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Patience Higgins reads
Eddie Allen trumpet
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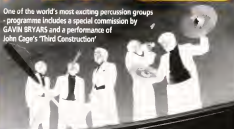
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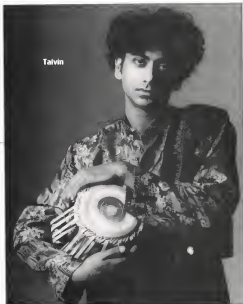
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Special thanks this issue to Jakubowski

Compiled by
Rob Young

News items
should reach us by
Friday 7 October
for inclusion in the
November issue

Live At The Ministry Of Sound is a wide-ranging mix of live music whose artistic director is the tabla player and percussionist Talvin Singh (recently heard as part of Björk's band). Taking place on three successive Thursdays in October, the event makes explicit connections between major players from dance, free, Ambient, dub and new composition (as Talvin appears onevery night with his band, comprising On-U Sound stalwarts Doug Wimbish, Skip McDonald and the Bombay-based vocalist Harinaran. The full programme is as follows:

African Head Charge, Angus, LMC artists, Talvin Singh Band, jazz poetry from One Hell Of A Storm, Asian Dub Foundation, Chili Out Label Western Classical Sound System, Beaconsfield live art and DJs (13 October), Zuvuya, Beaconsfield, LMC, Talvin Singh Band, Maxmaster Morns, Justin Robertson, Eastern Sound System (20), Darren Emmerson, Ethnic Tribe, Talvin Singh plus guests, Black British Photographers Autograph and 10 B, Alex Paterson, Jim Masters, The Smith Quartet, Acacia and Graham Massey from 808 State (27). There will also be an Internet 'Digital Playground', created by Digital Diaspora, on all three nights. Admission is £7, and things happen between 10 pm and — well, dawn the following morning.



Talvin

New MusiCA is the fourth annual series of contemporary music concerts at the Institute Of Contemporary Arts in London. There are seven nights in the series, running until January 1995. The first, on 16 October, features George W. Welch playing works by John White and Ian Gardener. Details from the ICA Box Office on 071 930 3647.

Disobey has extended its lifespan here on Earth — throughout 1995 it'll still be possible to listen to the most eclectic mixes of aural frottage to be found in a cocktail lounge ambience. Just time to mention their Deconstruction Special (29 September) with Christian Marclay, Philip Jeck and Stock, Hausen & Walkman, all of whom will be hanging, drawing and quartering the entire Blast First back catalogue. October's Disobey (27) features two sets by Japanese improv meister Keiji Hino: one a solo percussion slot, the other an extended guitar w/g-out. Disobey happens Upstairs At The Garage in North London and costs £6. Box Office number for all Disobey enquiries is 071 278 2094.

Terminal Futures at the Institute Of Contemporary Arts in London is a two day series of conferences and presentations examining aspects, positive and negative, of the digital revolution. One of the first interactive movies, *Burn Cycle*, will be previewed by Tripmedia on CD-i. Hex and Wdzine will be reviewing installations, while Division and S1% Studio provide virtual reality experiences. Sunday will be an 'Unnatural Afternoon', with panels discussing DIY media and radical techno-theory. An

installation entitled *Sonora* by interactive artist Graeme Weinbren will be running in the Nash Room from 27 September-3 October. Talks will be given by Steven Holzm, author of *Digital Monitors*, and the Critical Art Ensemble, authors of *The Electronic Disturbance*. It takes place on the weekend of 1-2 October, price £10 per day. Information from the Box Office on 071 930 3647.

Also at the ICA there's still just time to catch Stan Douglas's video installations, subverting familiar visual TV and film languages, such as 60s French TV jazz shows, silent cinema and US news bulletins. For *Hors-champs* (shown at the ICA), he surrounds an area with screens depicting a group of exiled musicians playing Ayler's 'Spirits Rejoice', while *Pursuit, Fear, Catastrophe*. *Ruskin BC* is a heading, melodramatic chase set to a Schoenberg score. The exhibition finishes on 2 October. Info on the ICA number above.

Sound Affairs is an innovative programme of contemporary pieces, including three world premieres, performed by Charlie Barber & Band. As well as works by Barber (inspired by the Balinese gamelan), Michael Nyman, Steve

Martland, David Lang and Barnaby Oliver (an arrangement of 'Wianawia Junction', first played by Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock), there are three new works — a tribute to the late Derek Jarman by the American Robert Moran, *Stark* by Graham Fitkin, and *Octaviana* by Chris Batchelor, a Django Bates sideman. The two Sound Affairs concerts are at Cardiff Bute Theatre (5 October, 0222 3721175) and London Purcell Room (12, 071 928 8800).

Gina Southgate has an exhibition of paintings and drawings at the Drill Hall Arts Centre, 16 Chenevis Street, Central London, between 24 October-26 November. As regular watchers of London's free improv circuit will already know, Southgate's speciality is real-time creation of work as a live music performance unfolds. The exhibition features a selection of these (including drawings made during this year's Company Week), as well as paintings made during the recording of Sylvia Hallert's new MASH album. Let's Face Out: Gina will be accompanying the Real Time group, featuring Susanna Ferrar, Mark Sanders and Alan Wilkinson, on a short tour in November — details next month. The Drill Hall exhibition is open Monday-Saturday 6 pm-11 pm (Mondays women only).

Trans-Global Underground.

featured this month on page 30, release their second album *International Times* (Nabon) this month, and play four Scottish dates before returning for a full-scale tour of the UK in November. Dates are Glasgow Garage (5 October), Dundee University (6), Aberdeen Lemon Tree (7), and Fife St Andrews University (8). Hustlers HC support on all dates.



Loop Guru. Nation Records' other mystic steppers, are taking a magic carpet ride around the UK this month. Dates as follows: North London University (4 October), Ashburton Lanterns Hotel (6), Bristol Thekla (7), Birmingham Mosley Dance Centre (8), Plymouth Coopersage (12), Portsmouth University (13), Nottingham Marcus Garvey Centre (14), Norwich Waterfront (15), Windsor Old Trout (19), Leeds Music Factory (20), Cambridge Boat Race (21), Leicester Princess Charlotte (22), Bath Hub Club (26), Cardiff Hippo Club (28), and Oxford Venue (29).

Ogun Records, campaigners for South African jazz and the British free jazz movement, celebrate their 20th birthday with a celebration concert on 19 October. Louis Moholo's Viva La Black, Keith Tippett with Julie Tippetts and Eilon Dean, and Evan Parker, duetting with John Stevens, all play at the 100 Club in Central London, beginning at 8 pm. Tickets are £8/£6 cons. Louis Moholo also plays with his Freedom Drum Orchestra at the Purcell Room on the South Bank on 11 October (7.30, £8, 071 928 8800).



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Quirky, home of the more radical exponents of the New Electronica, present another month of sonic disruption at the Vox club in Brixton, South London. Darren Partridge and Andrew Barker of 808 State DJ downstairs while the live space upstairs is taken over by those fellows from These Records, introducing two live sets from Barbed (7 October). The extraordinary, faceless Finnish Techno label Sahiko host the night of 14 October, while 21 is a dub night with Onghal Rockers and roots DJs Patrick Sardis and Roast Chicken. Finally, on 27, The Hafler Trio give their last live appearance anywhere, supported by Isolation terrorists Zoviet France. Quirky happens between 10 pm-6 am, admission £6, £4 before 11 pm, £5 concs, members £4. Ring 071 737 2095 for more details.

The Electronic Lounge at the ICA in London this month features a QJ set by Psychick Warriors Ov Gaia, who are apparently threatening to bring scissors to deal with anyone trying to gain entry whose hair is longer than five inches. We're sure they don't mean it, and are happily entering into the spirit of lively and democratic exchange that makes the Lounge more than just another club. The tribe gathers on 4 October, and as usual the price of entry is only £1.50. A night presented by Irdal is promised for November. Info from 071 498 3032.

Ismael Lo, the Senegalese singer,

follows his *Mango* album (so with an appearance on 25 October at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on London's South Bank. The concert starts at 7.45 pm, tickets are £12.50, and the Box Office is on 071 928 8800.

Diamanda Galas and John Paul Jones, the former Led Zeppelin bass player, perform material from their recent Mute album *The Sporting Life* at the only UK show on a longer European tour. It's on 31 October at the Shepherd's Bush Empire in West London, tickets £9.50, Box Office 081 740 7474.

Towering Inferno (see page 18) perform the British premiere of their multimedia epic *Kaddish*, based on the Jewish prayer for the dead, at the National Review Of Live Art in Glasgow on 19 October. The venue is The Arches, Midland Street (041 221 9736).

AMI make a (now rare) live appearance at London's Conway Hall, following a sensational set at the LHM festival this summer. The show is their last in the UK this year, before the group head off for Eastern Europe. The quartet performance (Eddie Prevost, Lou Gare, Keith Rowe and John Tibbony) happens on 1 October at 7.30 pm, price £6/£5. Box Office 071 242 8032.

Final Frontier (Fridays at Club UK, South London, 081 877 9929) have an impressive array of QJ talent lined up for October. The

Mr Bell Considers



PHOTO: CAROLINE FORBES

Yes, it's the most successful British movie of all time, grossing over £20 million. Mike Newell's *Four Weddings And A Funeral*. Music by Richard Rodney Bennett, and there are quite a few musicians in it, because of course you can't have a big wedding without a wedding band. So when I spotted my friend Simon Wallace's name in the credits — "Pianist in Second Wedding Band" — I called him up to ask what it was like to be on board such a runaway success.

"I'm not actually in it," he said.

What do you mean? You got a credit.

"Well, I'm on the soundtrack. You see, there's this band called Ronnie & The Wrecks. They came out of The Fabulous Poodles. They're a kind of R&B wedding band from hell, I mean they get booked for weddings by people who don't like wedding bands. So they were booked to play in the second wedding of the film."

"Then the film-makers decided to post-synce the music on afterwards, so The Wrecks didn't actually play anything, they just mimed. But their scenes ended up on the cutting-room floor, so they weren't in the film at all."

"Then they held a recording session to record the music that you would hear in that scene. Richard Rodney Bennett delegated this to his assistant. But when word got round that they'd have to read written music, one by one The Wrecks panicked, and rang up other musicians to put in depts. The original bass player and drummer bravely steamed in, in the interest of £148. So I got phoned at two am by a jittery pianist, who I think should remain anonymous, because he said he couldn't read the parts."

So the original pianist is neither seen nor heard in the film?

"He's neither seen nor heard nor credited."

How does he feel about that?

"Very relieved that he didn't have to sit in Lansdowne Studios and make pathetic excuses about not being able to read some very easy parts."

But I guess he can still tell people he's in that film?

"Yeah he's in the film, only you can't see him and he's not playing the piano."

The first time I met Simon he was writing a symphony, to be played by The Bangkok Symphony Orchestra, for the King of Thailand's 60th birthday. This wasn't something that he thought up himself, he was commissioned to do it. When I spoke to him this summer, he was just off to Edinburgh to play in John Dowse's *Dogman* show.

"I'm dressing up as a sailor and handing out lollipop sticks to children with jokes on the sticks."

That's to publicise the show, I presume?

"No, that is the show. Well, actually it's the interval."

CLIVE BELL

the office ambience

Space Age Bachelor Pad Music — Esquivel (BarNone)

A Quiet Place In The Universe — Sun Ra (Leo)

Another Thought — Arthur Russell (Point Import)

Prose Combat — MC Solar (Polydor)

Metrol — Ø (Sahiko)

Rite Time — Can (Spoon reissue)

My Yellow Wise Rug — Luke Slater's 7th Plain (GPR)

Vernal Crossing — Rapoon (Staalplaat)

The Third Chamber EP — Loop Guru (North South)

Emit 3394 — Various Artists (Time/Emit)

Studio Kinda Cloudy — Keith Hudson (Trojan)

Compiled by The Wire Sound System

club's three rooms will be filled by OJ and live sets from Andrew Weatherall, CJ Bolland, Justin Robertson, Revelation Collective (7 October), Detroit Techno veteran Blake Baxter, Vapourspace, Laurent Garner, Fabio Parais, Mike Edwards (14), Westbam, Carl Cox, Phil Perry, Billy Nasty, Silverfish Sound System (21), Ben Long, Bandulu, Jonathan Cooke, The Drum Club's Charlie Hall, Gayle San, Andrew Weatherall (again), and Whirl-Y-Gig OJs (28). A splendid time is guaranteed, etc



The Grand Union Orchestra's new project, *Songlines*, offers the chance for local choirs and string or brass players to participate in the music making, which is inspired by the Aboriginal music of Australia. Their current tour travels to Huddersfield Lawrence Batley Theatre (21-22 October, 0484 430528), Colchester Arts Centre (12-13 November, 0206 577301), and Thurrock Civic Hall (17, 0375 383961). Interested parties should phone 071 251 2100.

Glory Box, a voice/tapes/piano trio whose music is an intense meeting of dreampop and trance endurance, have a major showcase at the Purcell Room on London's South Bank (5 October, 8 pm, tickets £8/£5). The music making involves George Crumb-inspired internal piano activity and the excellent voice of Sara Parry, the evening will commence with a 20

minute star introduction by Harmeet Virdee. Details from the Box Office on 071 928 8800

Indian classical music's most revered masters will be performing in London over the next two months. Ustad Vilayat Khan (sitar) and Ustad Bismillah Khan (shehnai) perform a jugabandi duet for the first time outside India (8 October, Barbican, 071 638 8891). Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia (flute), Pandit Jasraj (vocal), Ustad Sultan Khan (sarang), Ustad Asghar Khan (sardul), Pandit Indrani Bhattacharya (sitar) and many more gather for a monster all-night concert (15, Royal Festival Hall, 071 928 8800). And next month, the sarod player Ustad Ali Akbar Khan plays at RFH (29 November)

Tony Bevan, the bass, tenor and soprano saxophonist, and his trio (Phil Minton, vocals, and Sieve Noble, percussion) take off on a short tour this month. Beginning at London Red Rose Club with John Russell on guitar (2 October, 071 263 5336), the joint continues at Aylesbury Limelight Theatre (3), Colchester Arts Centre (6), Oxford Holywell Room (7), Worcester Arts Workshop (8), and Cheltenham Axom Centre (9). More info from 0295 651443

Raag Rhythm & Rhyme are a meeting of different musical worlds in one sextet. They are on tour in the UK beginning at South Glamorgan Tythe Barn Theatre (21 October, 0446 794848), then Manchester Band On The Wall (26,



061 834 1786), Liverpool Bluecoat Arts Centre (27, 051 708 9050), Brentford Watermans Arts Centre (28, 081 568 1176), Belfast Guinness Spot (16 November, 0232 665577), London Blackheath Concert Halls (17, 081 463 0100), and Birmingham mac (19, 021 440 3838). More details from Jazz Services on 071 431 6901

Jazz Rumours (at the Vortex Jazz Bar in North London, 071 254 6516) presents Marco Mattos with Pat Thomas, Ian Smith and Simon Waterford (2 October), On The Loose with Franche Luce, Alex Maguire, Thebe Lipere, Neil Metcalfe and Roberto Bellatalla (9), The Saxophone Quartet with George Haslam, Elton Dean, Simon Picard and Lol Coxhill (16), Lynn Dobson, Tim Crowther and Jim Lebarg (23), Marco Mattos with Jim Denley, Phil Wachsmann and Mark Sanders (30). Price of entry is £4/£3

The SPNM (Society For The

Promotion Of New Music) are calling for submissions for their 'Voice In The Machine' course to be held between 2-4 December this year. The three-day course, at the University Of Bath, is an introduction to computer sound synthesis techniques, and composers currently living or studying in the UK are invited to submit works for piano and electronics or a solo piano piece that they wish to apply these methods to. To apply, and to find out what equipment will be available (no previous experience with it is necessary), contact Elizabeth Webb, SPNM, Francis House, Francis Street, London SW1P 1DE, or telephone 071 828 9696. Closing date is 31 October. From next month, *The Wire* will publish full details of forthcoming SPNM concerts and events

Cuarteto Patria, from Cuba, are known as the 'Godfathers of son'. Led by guitarist and singer Elades Ochi, the group formed as far back as 1940. See them in action on 14 October at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London (071 928 8800), 7.45 pm, tickets £7.50, £10, £12. They also play at Liverpool Hardman House Hotel on 15. Information from Andy Wood on 071 916 5479

August Competition Winners

The following win K Oder Ultraviolet merchandise: Mark Ransing, London, R Schalkenbos, Shatterford, Shirley O'Regan, London, Kevin O'Brien, Watford, WA Charlton, Birmingham. □

radio

Fixing It (BBC Radio Three, Mondays 10.45 pm-11.30 pm) Piece commissioned from Negativland, plus second instalment of report from San Francisco (3 October). Interview with John Oswald (17). Adrian Jack, artistic director of New MusICA, talks about New Music on Radio Three and previews his series *Between The Ears* (24). Tuvan avant rock from Bo Synrize, in session (31)

On The Wire (BBC Radio Lancashire, Mondays 7 pm-10 pm) celebrates ten years of eclectic life this month. Steve Barker's well-named show will play anything from Albert Ayler to Zeri Geva (and most points in-between). Network it now! (Steve talks to Ben Watson about On-U Sound on page 36 of this issue.)

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THE WIRE promotion

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Trilok doesn't just keep time — he decorates its interior. Dueting here with keyboardist Joe Zawinul, they sound like five players instead of two.

Repercussion Unit



"Dream Toon" from In Most Agents CMP 31

Every sound made by this US sextet involves something bashed, struck or rubbed, but the result is surprisingly gently musical. Creative carnival music.

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bites

"There's a lot of friction involved in our making music. I find that interesting. I like working with somebody who's pushing it into areas I may not move into on my own," says **David Sylvian**, who cemented his working relationship with Robert Fripp (which began on the 1986 album *Gone To Earth* and re-established itself on last year's studio project *The First Day*) on a three-month tour of Europe earlier this year.

The results can be heard on a new live album, *Damage*, where the sandpapering Frippertronics push him towards other textures than the leafy miniatures of *Brilliant Trees* or the later sound poems with Holger Czukay. "Robert sees things in broader strokes, I am more concerned with detail and composition. He would lay something down in the morning, and I'd spend the rest of the day editing it." Did Sylvian's first live appearances for

six years allow him to introduce elements of the unexpected into the music? "At first it was fresh and a little unstable, and quite exciting to perform. Eventually the structure became more concrete, but the give and take was something I'd never felt before."

Currently living in Minneapolis with his wife, former Prince protegee Ingrid Chavez, Sylvian remains immersed in the visual arts he recently exhibited *Redemption*, an installation created with Fripp, on a Japanese graveyard site ("There was a very potent energy"). Does this kind of work have increasing priority? "These offers come my way, it's not like I actually go out looking for work. But when they do surface, it's too intriguing to turn down."

Sylvian, who still calls himself a pop musician, continues to proselytize the shamanistic, healing qualities of music. "I know how music and art affects me, and therefore I know it can work. People write and tell me that the work has moved



them in many ways which helps them deal with the world.

"Enlightenment is a long way off, but I think that the work feeds back into life experience. That's the idea — that it can work as a catalyst in the process of self-awareness, focusing away from the external world and entering into the inner world, feeling comfortable there, and asking people to look a little closer, and in the process of questioning, develop." **ROB YOUNG** *Damage* is released by Virgin Records on 29 September

Bally Sagoo is the foremost producer in UK Asian pop music, with — count 'em — six platinum albums under his belt. Yet you've probably never heard of him. That's because Asian pop is a totally separate industry in this country, with its own distribution network that totally bypasses the chart-return system. And so Sagoo's huge sales have never translated into hits. All that may change now that he's signed to Sony.

Bally was born in New Delhi but has lived in

Birmingham since he was six months old. "I grew up on English and American dance. I never really liked traditional Indian music because it didn't have the kind of beef that I heard in hardcore street sounds." In the early 80s, Bally started remixing bhangra tunes, and declares, without a trace of modesty, that he "changed the whole of the Indian music industry, bringing in samplers and sequencers and other hi-tech." By 1990 he was making his own music and racking up hits (the best of which can be heard on the 1993 *Mango* compilation *On The Mix*).

"What I do is not really bhangra," says Bally, "because that was originally a traditional Punjabi folk music played at harvest time. What I'm really making is a new Asian pop that's very hi-tech and has a Hip-hop, Techno vibe."

Right now, Bally's dream is to score the UK's first Indian film hit with "Chura Lija", his gorgeous revamp of a classic Indian movie song. "Chura" will be followed by the LP *Bollywood Flashback*, named after India's motion picture capital. It consists of eight movie "superhits", turbo-charged with the groove-science that Bally has learned from Giorgio Moroder's Eurodisco, Chicago House, Jamaican dancehall and Belgian Techno. The result is a joyous, intoxicating

polyglot pop, although as pan-cultural hybrids go, Western dancefloor requirements dominate for all the Hindi melodies, tabla loops and sitar samples. Bally's own companion — with the 90s 'exotic' of Enigma's "Sadness" — is probably most fitting.

Sony's corporate muscle may propel Bally into the mainstream, but only if they can persuade Asian youth to change their ingrained record buying habits. Indian pop is mostly sold through local cornershops in the form of cheap cassettes. Will the kids be prepared to stump up three or four times as much for a CD in *Our Price* or *HiFi*? A pragmatic, commerce-minded fellow, Bally's determination to cross-over has little to do with the promotion of Asian culture or multicultural integration, but is related to his belief that "Asian music hasn't been properly exploited yet. I just hope we can bring it to the same level that House, ragga and Techno, are at the moment. It shouldn't be a specialist thing, it should be up there, loud and proud. Specialist just doesn't make sense." **SIMON KEYHOLDS** *Bollywood Flashback* is out this month on Sony.



Where are the guitarists of the New Music? Subtract the ones identified with Prime Time — Blood Ullmer, Bern Nix, and their harmolodic ilk, take away the crowd indebted to Derek Bailey, the abstract improvisors, omit Elliott Sharp, Caspar Brotzmann and the nose merchants, and who's left? Well, there is this one guy in Boston, named

Joe Morris

Born in 1955, he's been at it for a while, starting co-ops like the Boston Improvisers Group and The Magnetic String Trio, fronting a few bands of varying volume and rhythmic thrust with suggestive names like Racket Club and Sweatshop, and generally making a pest out of himself in a city that puts Pat Metheny on a pedestal. He has recorded five albums in the US, including the brilliant *Youniverse* from 1993 with saxophonist Rob Brown and drummer Whit Dickey, and this month sees the release of *Symbolic Gesture*, his first album for the Italian Soul Note label. Best of all, he sounds like no one else, which makes listeners and writers a bit uneasy. His playing has been pigeonholed in the harmolodic bracket by some, but it's not really that at all, in these pages Ben Watson called it "Albert Ayler played by Grant Green", which is closer to the mark (even though it doesn't take into account Morris's deep interest in West African string playing, which offered him a new freedom of phrasing and tonality).

Coming of musical age in Boston, Morris was first drawn to rock and fusion guitarists but was soon seduced by the blues. "Back when I was listening to fusion stuff in the 70s, learning how to improvise, I heard Buddy Guy and I thought he completely blew John McLaughlin out of the water. Not to put McLaughlin down, he was incredible, but Guy was so raw and so out, I loved it." Eventually, non-guitarists like Eric Dolphy and Jimmy Lyons were big influences on his playing. You can hear his personal distortion of the blues and Dolphy's rootless lyricism on the new CD's "Lowell's House", an infectious line that lays a groove and then sets the listener adrift by suspending harmonic and rhythmic progress for long interludes.

"Lowell's House" belongs to Lowell Davidson, the enigmatic and original pianist who recorded a legendary 1965 LP on ESP with Gary Peacock and Milford Graves. Davidson was Morris's mentor in all but name, and their eight year friendship and



collaboration helped solidify the guitarist's conceptual approach. "Lowell was metaphysical, on the brink of being psychedelic all the time. He was a really deep guy, without any of the usual catchphrases or notions about traditions that apply to the avant garde. He was completely courageous in how far he would go with his music — he was fearless about that. I think I aspire to be that way, but I want to do it in steps. I want to bring my instrument up there rather than just jump off and do it." **ART LANGE** *Symbolic Gesture* is out now on Soul Note (through Harmonia Mundi)



One of the common threads linking the post-rock groups is the conscious or unconscious willingness to reflect their immediate, urban environment, to let the sounds of the street seep in, in a way that conventional guitar based rock finds increasingly hard to do: think of Disco Inferno's haunting "Summer's Last Sound", Bark Psychosis's "A Street Scene", or most of Moonshake's recent output. "Living in King's Cross and making the album, you couldn't escape it," says Margaret Fiedler, who formed **Laika** with fellow former Moonshake member John Frenett and producer Guy Fissen after the group split last year. "It's all over the vocal tracks, if you mixed the levels in such a way you'd find it's all fucking sirens, car horns and buses screeching by. There is something unique about it, you can't help but reflect what happens to you in the environment you live in. It was like living in an island among chaos, very much done in isolation."

Pay a visit to Laika's Hackney home, and you are struck by the fact that this is a band less about urban living, than simply doing it, with all the autonomy that home studio equipment and samplers can buy. Listen to the group's debut album, *Silver Apples On The Moon*, and you can understand

what Guy Fissen means when he says, "We've made a record that doesn't sound like anything else." The record's dissonant percussive sound is thoroughly tempered by an extreme and (compared to many of their supposed peers) unusual melodicism. Margaret doesn't see any split between the Laika and Moonshake methodologies,

"other than that one decision to be more melodic."

For Laika, the rhythm is the thing, or, more correctly, rhythms ("It's like Ambient music to me to listen to percussion records," says Margaret.) Their unique territory is marked out by the music's frenetic, speedrushed density of percussion — which is filled out by God drummer Lou Cocobelli in the studio and by former PJ Harvey drummer Rob Ellis live. It's a sampledrick hybrid that deserves to be taken as seriously as this year's "TripHop" phenomenon has been already.

"I think most people sample really boringly," says Margaret. "You wouldn't be able to tell where I've sampled from most of the time, and I don't believe how they're used normally, with just no imagination. It's like a really amazing editing tool, really!" **JAKUBOWSKI** *Silver Apples On The Moon* is released later this month on Too Pure.

letter from costa rica

In an isolated corner of Central America,
a handful of musicians are perpetuating the
Caribbean traditions of dub, reggae and calypso



Cahuita Calypsonian,
Walter Gavitt Ferguson

PHOTO: JAMES KENDRICK

In Costa Rica there's a remote village where you'll hear "I Shot The Sheriff" day in, day out. Bob Marley's version, that is, blaring out from one of the many bars lining the short and dusty Wild West-style main street of Cahuita. Round the corner lies the Black Sand Beach, throbbing to lilting calypso rhythms or yet more reggae, courtesy of La Anicia Reggae Bar. Beneath the gently swaying palms, this favourite rasta haunt sports gleaming red, yellow and green paintwork blistering in the glare of the tropical sun.

Light years away from the Westernized hubbub of Costa Rica's capital city San Jose, Cahuita sprawls contentedly on a narrow strip of land between the jungle and the Caribbean Sea. Along the Talamancan coastline, the typically light-skinned Latinos you'll find in the rest of Costa Rica are few and far between: this is Afro-Caribbean country, and the attendant lifestyle reigns supreme.

Hispanic lyrics don't go down well with the Talamancan Coast's English-speaking population. Reggae and calypso, those vehicles for social criticism born respectively on the islands of Jamaica and Trinidad, are the tradition here. Not surprisingly, as the population's ancestors came over from the Caribbean islands in the 19th century, first as farmers and fishermen and later to toil in the banana plantations of the mighty United Fruit Company.

On a fine day, sitting out on the bench in front of the reggae stronghold Salon Sarafina, you might get to exchange a few words with Cahuita's very own legend, the 75 year old Calypsonian Walter Gavitt Ferguson. A self-taught musician, Mister Gavitt, as he was known in his heyday, started off playing his brother's mouth organ, from which he rapidly progressed to the guitar and the danner. That was back in the 40s and 50s, the golden years of calypso, and as his fame began to spread, other Calypsonians from Panama, the Caribbean islands and the Nicaraguan town of Bluefields, would come to Cahuita to engage in verbal duels with the shy and modest Gavitt, sometimes for hours on end. "The rhyme was the most important," he'll explain in his Caribbean-accented English. "And I had a way of playing the calypso rhythm on guitar that was unique."

The calypsos he has composed are humorous, satirical comments on human behaviour, social problems and village life, many draw on the West African Anansi folk tales which are an integral part of Afro-Caribbean culture. Nowadays, you'll find folk historians, musicians and journalists driving down the single, pot-holed road that links Cahuita to the rest of the world. They come to pay their respects to the retired calypso champion, who played, sang and composed his music after long days working in the fields.

Today, it's the local rastas who are perpetuating Cahuita's musical heritage. On a balmy evening, when the driving tropical rain lets up, some of them will be playing live music at the Black And White bar. One musician will play the *cuajongo*, a Caribbean bass instrument consisting of a single string attached to a stick which rests on a circular base. Another will play the *tumba*, a traditional percussion instrument. The dynamic, impassioned singer will pace the floor, shaking his dreads and calling out to the audience, while the bar throbs to versions of "Redemption Song", "Legalize It" and other JA classics.

But it's uphill work for Walter Ferguson's spiritual heirs. Ricardo, an ex-musician, explains that "music is in my blood. I've always done it," but these days he can't afford to pursue his passion. "We're Jamaican — we were just born here," declares Roberto, another musician, with some pride, standing in front of the ramshackle wooden shack where he's lived all his life. Yet Roberto can't afford an instrument of his own and his band has nowhere to rehearse. When they do get to play, it's reggae, calypso, merengue, salsa. "Whatever the tourists ask for." Unfortunately, the tourists don't ask for the band's own music and the locals, according to Roberto, turn a deaf ear. "People say, why don't you do something with your music? But I can't sell my property for a group. We just have to keep on living out our poor lives."

For the time being, Cahuita is still stuck fast in the Bob Marley groove. But on some evenings, the Latin salsa blaring out from the crowded Salon Vaz club drowns out Gregory Isaacs in Sarafina's next door, while down the road in Cafeteria Vishnu, a young waitress sings along to the plaintive tones of Big Boy's 19 year old singer, the latest Puerto Rican rap sensation. **RAHMA KHAZAM**



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PHAROAH SANDERS
GIL SCOTT HERON
BILLY PARKER
CECIL BRIDGEWATER
STANLEY COWELL
BRIAN JACKSON
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Peter Hammill is still perfecting the art rock of survival

As in any culture, the might-have-beens in rock are at least as intriguing as the actualities. What would have happened if Peter Hammill had sought and secured the solo success which Peter Gabriel assumed as a global pop eminence? It might not be as far fetched as it seems. Both left heroic, doomy art rock bands in favour of individual soliloquising, both put their theatrical voices and words far ahead of their modest instrumental abilities, both adapted a peculiarly English accent to musings on everyman's fate.

Perhaps it was Gabriel's gift for a hook and a knack for sucking in a star-studded cast of players that let him push ahead. Peter Hammill chose to persist with resolutely unglamorous records and skilful, unfashionable musicians. "Happily and unhappily, of course, I don't have the hits." Hammill's last laugh should be that while Gabriel's music has taken on all the pomposity and vacuity he sought to escape from in Genesis, the other Peter continues to create acute, prickly, eloquent song cycles that bear an unmistakable stamp.

He has done some 25 of them in 25 years now. The latest, *Roaring Forties*, is as fierce and hard won as each of the others. Like any Hammill record, it is dense with its own substance and might seem both unctuous and obtuse to many a non-believer. Melody has never been Hammill's strong point, and like so many of his hundreds of songs, the tunes here are like semi-wound strings that never really resolve. Having listened to the record many times, I still can't hum any of it, and find the punky salvo of "Sharply Unclear" as difficult as the vast, multi-tenanted epic which is "A Heading Stretch".

What sustains the record are Hammill's abiding virtues: his intensity, his cutting edge even in the midst of a philosophical haze, his passion for form, his dark insistence, his alternately sweet and harsh singing. There are always some old sores and familiar precepts on Hammill's records: here, in "You Can't Want What You Always Get", he delivers the kind of admonition that sages have offered to juniors for centuries. But in "A Heading Stretch" he also distils wisdoms that take a judicious

extra step in a fantastically elaborate songbook on the spasms and joys of growing older, a litany he's been writing for the best part of 20 years.

"Thematically," he says, "age and ageing is a central theme this time. There comes a point where you realise that now is not a permanent state. That there is a past and one hopes there is a future. I think about time a great deal, and I have done for years and years now. All this shouldn't just be about youth culture, after all."

And so Peter has written on the endless variety of interpersonals, on fate's cruel happenstance, on a man's journey from here to there and everything in between. Whether in the context of Van Der Graaf Generator, the most baroque of all art rock ensembles, or on his long sequence of solo records and performances, Hammill ekes out his twists and variations with the patience of a man who knows this is a lifetime's work. On live records such as *Vital* or *Flight* the music is brutal and often devoid of mirth or even light. On some of his studio collections he constructs keyboard and guitar frameworks that tremble and sparkle, try the still marvellous *The Future Now* from 1977, or more recent sets such as *Skin* or *Andkoseasthis*. His voice, either a lupine tenor or a weary, choirboy murmur, tracks all the changes of mood. He can make it sound like one long confessional at times, but that is the songwriter's trade, and the balance between life and art is one Peter has long since negotiated.

"I certainly didn't decide to lead the life of a musician. I stayed outside in order to maintain a grasp on a normal life. Of course, it's not normal to make records and go out and perform, or even to analyze the human experience. It's a privilege and a curse to be able to do these things. But I don't offer myself as experimental material for other people to get their kicks or their observations. I try to offer songs as a sometimes-it's-like-this: a part of me, perhaps, but not here's the latest tranche of me.

"I'd rather write fictionally than autobiographically. I'm a near-miss love song writer, rather than the full blown gardenia. I like things that happen just outside the frame, in personal songs. When one doesn't quite know what it is, what damage or healing is being done between the two characters. I've never liked dogmatic songs. I always preferred mood and atmosphere.

"The reality of my life," he says, smiling, "is stable family man, who happens to go off and grapple in a studio for weeks and months. Somehow the two things have to work out. It may be harder on the family than it is on me. They don't come on tour with me. When your eldest daughter is 14, that also fuels reflections on age and rites of passage.

"Whether you're a singer or whatever, it's precisely because of rates of change in a relationship that conflicts can occur. You're not going to be going at the same speed all the time. But somehow one has one's life." **RICHARD COOK**

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The subject of **Towering Inferno's** multimedia piece *Kaddish* is nothing less than "the worst catastrophe of the 20th century". **Dave Morrison** reports.

Heard the one about the self-financed, four-years-in-the-making, 75 minute album about the Holocaust that narrowly missed the top ten nominees for this year's Mercury Music Prize? No? Well that album is *Kaddish* by the UK multimedia (music and film) group Towering Inferno. One of the most uncompromising projects of the last 12 months, even with its inherent accessibility it was a surprise contender.

"One of the criticisms from the judges who wouldn't vote for it," says the group's Andy Saunders, "was, 'these guys should have got a proper producer in, because a proper producer would have cut it down to 45 minutes' And that sums up the music industry for me. What it is, is a good argument for not having a producer and bringing out a self-financed project like *Kaddish*, because it underlines that you can't do it if a record company is funding it."

Towering Inferno consists of Saunders and fellow musician and film maker Richard Wolfson (with additional input from visual director Roger Riley and sound engineer Greg Skerman). Musically, the two started out as teenage Heavy Metal guitarists, moved through "Dollar Brand South African conceptual-type jazz", with ears bent towards *This Heat* and an interest in Ambient music from early Brian Eno to environmental recordings to Techno. Saunders was tutored in saxophone by Elton Dean, and Wolfson worked with a modern composers group (Objective Music). This eclectic background, combined with their orthodox Jewish upbringing, informs *Kaddish's* diverse structures and remit, which incorporate Hungarian folk singer Maria Sebesteny and compatriot poet Endre Szekeres, a string quartet, drummers (including Gaspar Lawal) and a choir, alongside samples, brass, guitar and a host of other sound sources.

"It's always been our concern to bring together the very heavy with the very cool Ambient," says Saunders. "Unless you bring these together you're very limited with what you can do musically, especially if that music's implying film."

Formed in 1986 as a reaction to the desperate state of pop video and the self-indulgence of rock performance, the duo decided to make film the visual focus of the group. They weren't held back by having no previous knowledge of film making.

"We started with still photography and Super 8 — very simple technology that anyone can use. Super 8 was before video and was the democratic film medium," explains Riley.

A few bands from the experimental sphere who dabbled with visuals may have been triggers. They cite Cabaret Voltaire, Throbbing Gristle and Psychic TV, in their formative years, as possible influences. The idea of producing a multimedia project based on the Holocaust arose when they were on tour in Germany. They visited the site of the concentration camp at Dachau and a lengthy argument as to whether or not to film there opened up a lot of stuff (stills are used in the show). At the time they also realised some deep-rooted memories rising to the surface in their music.

"We began to realise that the music we were writing was influenced by music we had heard as children in the synagogue," explains Wolfson, "which is quite an odd realisation as Jewish music simply is not cool."

"In other oppressed cultures it's very cool to have a role in pop culture — like Black Culture — but Jews don't bring their culture into pop. Why?" asks Saunders.

"A number of the pieces that sound like East European Jewish pieces happened without any thought at all," says Wolfson. "But when we realised things were going in this direction, we consciously began collecting material that could be used in this way, like the shofa, a ram's horn that's blown in the synagogue. It's an extraordinarily powerful sound."

"The actual prayer *Kaddish* [the Jewish prayer for the dead which opens and closes the piece] has an extraordinary sound — just musically, the words in the Hebrew," continues Saunders. "It's something that I remember as a child as being something quite haunting. In a sense it's like a symbol of the 20th century — the worst catastrophe that happened in the 20th century."

Kaddish stands on its own as a fully realised piece of music but it was written and constructed principally as a soundtrack (some of the images from the film are reproduced opposite). 15 hours of material was recorded live and in studios all over Europe and edited down ("like film rushes," remarks Saunders).

"If you had to compare it to film editing," says Riley, "it would be something like Orson Welles's *Ochelo*, where someone is in dialogue and half a close-up is filmed in Aigiers and the other half is filmed six months later in Rome, but the two sides hang together perfectly in the final shot."

Kaddish had its world premiere at the Belluard Bolwerk International Festival in Fribourg, Switzerland in July, with the dynamic, idiosyncratic stage presence of Endre Szekeres an additional focus. The visuals, a mixture of stills, film collages and split-screen juxtapositions, were powerful, emotive, overwhelming at times, meshing with the music to form an 'unconscious narrative'. Footage of rampaging Nazis was used very sparingly.

"If you use documentary footage unblinkingly," suggests Riley, "it brings in so much pre-existing cultural and emotional baggage, it almost renders the music meaningless. But by using the unexpected image or the image that reinforces the emotion tangentially, you're actually saying something more meaningfully."

Towering Inferno view themselves as being out on a limb in the music and visual field because of the thematic unity of their work (unlike, say, more impressionistic projects such as *Koyaanisqatsi* or *Baraka*). They feel their work is more akin to Derek Jarman's methodology, especially the transformation of Super 8 movies into feature films. (A feature film project of *Kaddish* with production company Basilisk — who worked with Jarman on *The Garden*, *The Lost Of England* and *Blue* — is in the planning stages).

The audience at Fribourg were visibly moved. Maybe that's not so remarkable at a Performing Arts Festival but Towering Inferno have also played successful shows to teenagers in an Italian disco and to a Swiss audience that was 70 per cent army ratings. Why do they feel they can communicate with such apparent ease?

"What *Kaddish* is not saying is 'fuck you'," says Wolfson. "Most avant garde musicians seem to have this chip on their shoulders that they're lone warriors fighting the 'normals'. As Towering Inferno we'd never have achieved our effect musically or visually through alienation." □

The UK premiere of Kaddish takes place at The National Review Of Live Art, Glasgow on 19 and 21 October. A CD version of the project is available through ReR Recommended.



Richard H Kirk is still processing dark new worlds in electronic sound

intelligent lifeform

"Electronic music," says Richard H Kirk. "It's something I've been doing for 20 years." Sometimes, electronically delineated music (Techno, Ambient, Industrial, HipHop — all those rigid, misleading terminologies) seems so concerned with leaving the present (projecting us and it into an imagined future that is either Utopian fantasy or dark dystopia depending on the mood of the moment), that it is easy to forget that it has a past, and is also bound, trammelled and defined by its own histories and traditions.

The music Richard Kirk has been producing across the last two decades, mostly as a member of Cabaret Voltaire, but also under the pseudonyms Sandoz, Sweet Exorcist and Electronic Eye, is instructive in this respect. Within it you can trace the progress of most of the principal ideas and developments that have fed into electronic music since the early 70s, from the 'Industrial' groups' use of tape splicing and found sounds to the post-Kraftwerk innovations of American producers such as Marshall Jefferson and Derrick May (Kirk has worked with the both of them). It's a substantial, wide-ranging body of work, and a testament to the integrity of a musician who has stuck to his original vision (the potential of technology to create new worlds through the manipulation and processing of sound) while remaining flexible enough to respond to and assimilate external advances and stimuli.

Kirk has lived in Sheffield all his life (although he is a frequent traveller and has just returned from a trip to West Africa). He still operates out of the Western Works studio which he established in the mid-70s with fellow CV members Chris Watson and Stephen Mallinder (Kirk is effectively the last remaining member of the group. Watson left in the early 80s, and Mallinder's involvement has been minimal since he moved to Australia in 1993). Sheffield itself is a repository of post-punk myth and tradition concerning the development of UK electronic music. "Mmm," says Kirk, "all the way back to The Cabs and groups like The Human League and Clock DVA. And today you've got labels like Warp and [Wau! Mr] Modo here, and studios like Fon."

Why does he think the city has such a tradition of electronic experimentation? "Because of Roxy Music and Eno. They were very popular in this city in the mid-70s, and Eno's notion of non-musicianship, of how anyone could do music, was taken up by a lot of people who started making music during that period."

Kirk is just coming off a creative roll that has seen him release eight albums in the last two years. The latest is *Closed Circuit*, recorded under the name Electronic Eye and released on the Beyond label. "It was inspired by a book called *Electronic Eye* by an American academic

writer, David Lyon, which covers the whole gamut of electronic surveillance — in the workplace, shopping precincts. It's also there in terms of when you use a credit card you're leaving electronic footprints. It's part of the society we live in and not necessarily a good thing, although we're encouraged to think of it that way."

Several of the tracks on *Closed Circuit* highlight Kirk's interest in electroacoustic modern/primitive hybrids, the potential in fusing organic and digital sound sources. "The first Sandoz CD was a mixture of electronic and World Musics tribal rhythms and sampled voices from various ethnic musics. It's something that's spilled over into a lot of other things I'm doing. I've been listening to old dub and reggae — Lee Perry, King Tubby — for years, and I've always been a fan of Fela Kuti and African music, which was why it was nice to go to Ghana: a lot of the music I'm influenced by comes from that region, so it was good to get to its source, to see what society produced that kind of music. Using sampling technology enables me to integrate those elements into the music. The logical consequence of that would be to actually start working with musicians from Africa and Latin America, integrating their methods into mine, rather than just sampling them."

How does he go about assembling a piece of music? "It's kind of an intuitive process now that comes from years of doing it. Most of the stuff I do is programmed and quite orchestrated, although sometimes I'll switch off the computer and go back to the old dub way of working where you're interacting with the mixing desk, I don't spend a long time on a piece of music. I don't go back and refine things. The skill in doing programmed music is to make it sound spontaneous."

Why does he think that certain electronic musicians, from Coil to Aphex Twin, are rejecting the technology of the digital revolution and going back to using the kind of pre-digital analogue synthesizers and equipment that he was using in the early days of Cabaret Voltaire?

"One of the appeals of old analogue synths is that they have knobs and filters that you can bend and turn. With the new stuff, you've got one set of controls that covers everything: creating a different sound or changing a parameter involves pushing buttons or punching in a load of numbers, which isn't so much fun."

"A lot of the stuff that we used to do with The Cabs was created by tape edits, slowing stuff down. There were no samplers so that was how you manipulated sound. The other thing that people don't seem to go for now is using ring modulators, actively feeding sounds through processors. The people who make the equipment don't seem to cater for it. It would be interesting if they began manufacturing equipment to process sound rather than just modules that come with a pre-loaded set of options." **TONY HERRINGTON**

A black and white photograph of two men, Tim Bowness and Richard Barbieri, looking directly at the camera. Tim Bowness is on the left, with short dark hair, wearing a dark shirt. Richard Barbieri is on the right, with long dark hair, also wearing a dark shirt. The background is dark and out of focus.

tim bowness / richard barbieri

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Minimalist karaoke, shoe fetishists, Occitan jazz metal, vocal anarchists and Algerian rap — all this and more can be heard on France's **radios libres stations. Sylvestre Balazard tunes in to a surreal circus of the air.**

Paris, midweek, five pm. One turn of the radio dial and there is the first voice: "All right, one, two, three," it says, speaking down a telephone from somewhere, and then the singing starts: "La-de-da, la-de-da, la-de-da." A second voice, also connected by phone, joins in: "Dum-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum." This minimalist, a cappella karaoke lasts a good two minutes before the first voice suggests to voice two that really, they need practice, or maybe a third participant to spice it all up. Immediately, the show host (silent until now) switches to onomatopoeic mode and a three-part vocal symphony improvised by total strangers fills my bedroom, somebody's car, a deserted restaurant.

This is just one of the many surreal listening experiences to be heard on France's 'radios libres', the independent, pirate radio stations which have been the most exciting element of the French media for the past 14 years.

In the UK, pirate radio has been romanticised out of all proportion, characterised as a samezdat, fly-by-night mission, conducted by shady youths with mobile phones and diminished record collections, to break down the restrictive barriers of the UK's radio landscape. The truth is somewhat different, of course, and the only thing that the pirates have added to UK radio is a series of erratic and self-indulgent urban 'stations' programming idiosyncratic jungle and ragga.

In Paris, the radios libres have extended the FM waveband to the point where such unlikely bedfellows as Radio Libertaire (the Fédération Anarchiste's 'Voice without a master'), the devout and patriotic Radio Notre-Dame, the gay Fréquence Gai, the reactionary Radio Courtoise, as well as Arabic, African, Caribbean and Jewish community stations cohabit in chaotic harmony. The city now has between 40 and 50 radio stations broadcasting around the clock, and about 80 per cent of them are radios libres. The impact on the musical world in particular of such a wide ranging choice of listening has been profound and multifarm.

The radios libres were a spontaneous creation. When they first began to appear in 1980, the radio band was occupied by about ten stations, either state controlled or unashamedly commercial and populist. There was something totalitarian about the French pop world of the 1970s, an incestuous media oligarchy that would churn out such wide-eyed pap as to make Vanessa Paradis sound like Napalm Death. Then, in 1980, cheap radio transmitters began to be imported from Italy. Braving illegality, a group of friends could club together to buy one and broadcast from a private apartment until the police came to seize it and a new one had to be bought. The appeal of this new and often radical voice was too much for the newly elected socialist government, and in 1983 the FM band was eventually regulated and the radio libres made over into outlaws. Since then, as market forces have reaped their grim harvest, most of the French radio audience, and with it most of the advertising revenue, has been captured by a small number of corporate national networks, all broadcasting a strict diet of mainstream music.

In terms of choice, however, the radical and bizarre remains widely available. It is Radio Ici Et Maintenant! (Here And Now!) which provides such unlikely listening experiences as the one detailed above. Now more than 14 years old, it has retained its extremist format of round the clock unfettered phone-ins through the years and according to the station's Didier DePlage, it is mainly for technical reasons that it is not dispensing with hosts altogether.

Tuning into Ici Et Maintenant!, I have heard one Hungarian man explain his fetish-religion in the dead of night to other, disbelieving listeners (he worshipped a shoe). Here too I have listened as other listeners connected their telephone to their stereo, because, er, they've

got this song they quite like and if we don't, too bad. Stations such as Radio Libertaire and Radio Nova are more conventional perhaps, but their policies of programming radical French rap and punk and a polyglot world mix respectively are unheard of in the UK.

Such originality is not the privilege of capital dwellers. From the distant recesses of Lahitte-Toupière in the Provençal (population 200, nearest town none), I have been able to pick up Radio Pais which broadcasts a programme of jazz, metal and punk in Occitan (the Provençal language). Here is a mix that can be experienced nowhere else in the world. As all the programmes are in Occitan I have never been able to track down any of the records played, nor to ascertain where this eerie music comes from. I love it, of course. Check it out next time you're in Lahitte-Toupière.

The radios libres have also had a wider and redeeming influence on French culture. They have provided a platform for the less 'shallow' side of French-language pop (Charlie Couture, Alain Souchon, Jacques Higelin) to flourish, and created a climate where the French charts include an 'honest' proportion of indigenous acts. It is ironic that talk of setting up a mandatory quota of French language music stations has been so fierce of late, and the FM band denounced as the Trojan horse of Anglo-Saxon imperialism, for it is in the illegal wilderness that the demand for comprehensible songs has been properly addressed for the first time. Attempts to legislate on pop language seem particularly demagogic: as even the most commercial stations now broadcast about 20 to 30 per cent of French songs, and highly successful others are entirely devoted to the Gallic tongue.

The other flaw in this patriotic scheme is that English, the only avoided enemy, is just one of a plethora of languages to be heard on the air. If opposition to the bill is strong among radio programmers so it should be among music fans too, and not just in France. Some of the best recent music to be heard anywhere has been produced on French soil, and little of it is sung in French. Much more flexible than the 'corner shop' system, the radios libres have provided the perfect medium for the music of the country's expatriate Caribbean and Central or North African musicians, allowing the 'Galloised' children of immigrants to expand their audience without causing a violent seizure with their own community.

Beur FM, for instance, is one of those stations which address first generation Franco-North African youth ('beurs' in slang). Typically, out of five songs on any of the station's shows, three will be in Arabic, one in another North African language and a fifth in English or French. Thus a cumulative cross-pollination takes effect, first among North African communities which mingle for the first time in France, and secondly between North Africa and 'Western' culture. According to Ahim, one of the top men at Beur FM, a typical group of Beur youths today will include blacks and whites. He also suggests that Beurs relate to reggae and rap because they connect to their social contexts as well as to their African-derived beats, and that conservatism on the station's part would not make commercial sense.

Radio waves float across cultural boundaries. There is thus a small but involved white audience for Beur FM. African and Caribbean radio stations draw even more white listeners. Here is the main reason why the French public has grown so accustomed to Algerian rai, Caribbean zouk, Zairean soukous and Senegalese mbalax as mainstream musics. All these genres have enjoyed considerable success in France, escaping the kind of ghettoisation that has afflicted a comparable UK-based 'ethnic' music such as bhangra.

I often wonder what a genuine radios libres situation could lead to in the UK: after the FM revolution, will Punjabi HipHop punk nd us of sad white boys with guitars and a 1973 fixation forever? □



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artefacts and

Christian Marclay and John Oswald
are sonic collagists, sampling and deconstructing the global soundbanks in a subversive challenge to the sanctity of recorded sound. **Mark Sinker (Marclay)** and **Ed Baxter (Oswald)** report.



The last time I spoke to Christian Marclay (in 1988) he told me of future projects with CDs, since vinyl was already on the wane in America. Scratch-mixing seemed something of a problem, with this new unscratchable medium, but he was looking for a way in. "What happens on some of these recordings," he told me, "if there's a big scratch the computer within the machine compensates for the missing information. If it goes really bad then there's these new sounds, the defective sounds of a new technology. No technology is perfect, there's always that little crevice, that little mistake — it's maybe something to think about."

This was six years ago, and I went away and thought about it, and created a little world of imaginary information about what Marclay was now up to, tacking damaged CDs into all kinds of weird machine-improv. Meanwhile he played with them for few months, and discovered they were dull: at once too clever and too stupid for Marclayan conceptual cut-up, for real-time physical manipulation as instruments. He came to feel they were also in a strange way more time locked than their predecessors, dated by the illusory 'modernity' of an era already fast

passing — the 80s — with the ugly little logo required to be stamped on every disc, the slick, bland look, the packaging shortcuts and print sized hand-me-down presentation strategy. Far less resonant, for sure, than the vinyl that was — supposedly — being supplanted.

Already tiring of turntable manipulation, he didn't switch to collages with CD sleeves, or cut-up Frankenstein sculptures of digital picture-discs (the obvious — if boring — extension of his longtime games with vinyl). Perhaps a secret announcement had been made, of a more startling death than the LP and the single? Those writers sadly marking the death of the three minute 45 — and with it the onset of their senescence — didn't think to wave goodbye, with it, to recording in general, to the notion of the archive, the document, the manageable sum of human knowledge. But what if vinyl's passing did not simply mean the arrival of a newer, better substitute, but a turn away from a whole century-long way of thinking?

Marclay already assumed that vinyl's passing was what had interested him, the reason he'd returned again and again in his art installations to idiosyncratic and rituals taken for granted until they ceased to be routine — when they became both quaint and emotionally forceful. Now he began to wonder whether recording itself was only a passing phase. A swift century's dalliance with a canned alternative, and then back to the real, real-time thing, freed now from local clubs, to be played — and interfered with, altered and improvised into and against — over global e-mail links, by wire and by ether, up and away from the repeatable permanence of dust-gathering plastic. The LP was around 40 or 50 years, the CD barely lasted ten. "Nothing lasts forever," as he said, when we spoke again after six years.

fictions

TO Mark Sinker fax 011 44 81
FROM Christian Marclay fax 212
DATE 8.25.94

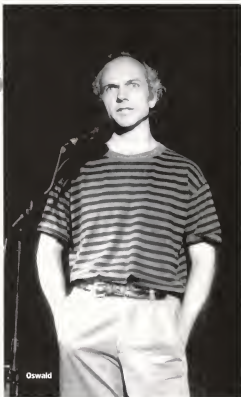
(Extract): "In the future, recordings — the frozen music of the past — will be replaced by 'live' music again. Digital music suggests the beginning of a more fluid music, an interactive and improvised music, resembling an on-line conversation. Instead of listening passively to a finite, self-contained recording, one will become an active participant in — selecting, editing, sampling, looping — transforming the music in unimaginable ways. This real time jam on the Internet will be more akin to earlier music, before the appearance of the fixed recordings. The music of the future will be constantly manipulated, always evolving, an unstable flow of sounds, never the same twice. This music will be ephemeral again, free of permanent recordings, free of marketing devices. Information will be liberating rather than controlling. I do not believe that computers will control us, but rather create such a huge fluid network that it will escape control, regulation, and recording."

In days gone by, the library, which others called the Universe, was the place everything that could be known was gathered, and your personal collection was a smaller copy, purely for convenience. Later, when there was more stuff to be gathered, you collected in order to catch that which the library perhaps chose to miss out on, to rival or challenge its assumptions, your shelves a personal essay in counterculture and rogue canon forming.

At some point in the last four or five years it may have struck you that — as stuff now pours out in unvanquishable number — the logics of collection-for-knowledge, official or rogue, have failed. Every time you stack up a new CD or file a second-hand LP, something whispers: *Why bother — if you can't collect them all, why get any?*

"You still see records in fashion shoots," says Marclay. "They have a little turntable and records all over the floor. They have such a strong visual value. It just means freedom, rebellion, at least for our generation."

Such badges of rebellion-through-ownership, unalloyed signs of the remembered intensity of youth, mistaken for reality, turn — it seems — to paste when reproduced, however perfect the



reproduction. Even if the reproduction is better than the original, even when the original was always already itself a reproduction. And everything is now available to all, and the sedimentations of generationally acquired taste that sited up round the imperfections of earlier formats are swept away. The result? Death by inanition in the mausoleum of plenty.

Christian Marclay (born in California, raised in Geneva, moved to New York in time to see Conceptualism and No Wave in full effect) is associated — obliquely enough — with a skill that will also decline, the use of a record turntable as a musical instrument in its own right, the bringing of new life to mummified fragments of sound. He turns back, ostensibly, to move forward. His real subject, however, is the dust of the tomb.

His first release, *record-without-a-cover* (1985), replicated the build up of detritus in the groove itself, celebrated the failure of a soon-to-be-replaced mechanism, but also what we had grown to love in it. Surface hiss as objective correlative of our love not for things ideal but things material, our abiding complicity in the despised processes of

MAGIC WORD GAINED



**“The music of the *future*
will be constantly manipulated,
always evolving,
an unstable *flow* of sounds,
never the same twice.”**

fetishisation, commodification and alienation

He put hollowed-out speaker cabinets on a balcony, and scattered them with bird seed, so that birds came and nested. He filled a room with casts of white telephone headsets, and called it *Boneyard*. In Berlin he took the utopia of the implied space of a record made by studio sampling (where an element of any one culture can sit calmly next to an element of another) and put it out in the world. With 180 musicians, 56 kinds of music and three conductors, a gigantic living scratch-mix, to mock resurgent fascism. Not avant gardists, either, but local marching bands, rockers, folk or opera singers and a retired people's choir. More than once, he has floored an exhibition with old LPs, so that footsteps track across the precious plastic. Some of the point, at least, is the pang of feeling this induces in anyone who's carefully ensured that their copy of, for example, Dean Martin's *The Dean Sings* (MFP 1001, mid-60s) always goes back in its original plastic inner sleeve after use.

His projects — his 'non-musical' projects, though he doesn't like to distinguish so much — are often about these kinds of emotion: the confusions of genuine aesthetic response with conditioned reflex. As when, earlier this year, in Switzerland, he put on a show in the form of a concert, advertised all over town with five radically different kinds of poster. His was the name on it, at the same time and place, but variously promoted as metal guitarist, classical violinist, French cabaret singer, New Age folkie and jazz saxophonist, each with scrupulously appropriate design, lettering, picture-style (clashed, as he put it, but plausible, not spoof). The two audiences would arrive with their several expectations, and ?

"This ambient buzz which is surrounding you everywhere you go you don't even hear it any more, it's just part of this noise-landscape that you have in a city. We've lost this active involvement with the music. Whatever the negative things this technology has, it forces you to be creative. I see the same kinds of things happening with music... People are able to get interested, to communicate on subjects they care about.

So maybe what we're doing — with all this sampling — is just a very primitive beginning. I bought a computer just a year ago, I feel like a beginner."

The sum of human knowledge. That sum is way beyond our grasp, any of us as a result, we need to start looking at different models of information organisation. The library is no longer a lifeline but a threat, a sneer at feeble mortality. It isn't the music dying, it's us (or anyway our imaginations). □

Christian Marclay appears at London's Disobey Club on 29 September (see Sounding Off for details), and can also be heard, alongside John Oswald, Stock,hausen & Walkman, Disco Inferno and others, on the Blast First CD Deconstruction (see page 39 for details)

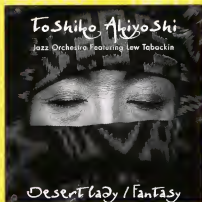
It was as an improvising saxophonist that John Oswald last appeared in London, a dozen years back, performing an abruptly curtailed solo at one of the Actual Music Festivals. Oswald admits that he is not stage-friendly. The paraphernalia of public performance — smoky rooms, PAs, audience expectations — makes him uncomfortable, and back then he preferred not to play in competition with an intrusive air conditioning unit.

His stage appearances are infrequent ("twice in a blue moon") and nowadays improvising is chiefly a hobby — one which he pursues with friends in Toronto on a weekly basis and which very occasionally leads to recordings further afield. "A necessary function of my being at all effective or personally satisfied as an improviser," he explains, "was to not make a job or a career out of it." Instead, he turned to audio piracy —



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COLUMBIA



Sony Music

'plunderphonics', pursued in his very own Mystery Lab, of which he is the project director and sole employee, and where he conducts telling probes into the structure of recorded matter

The Lab's early output was all limited-run mail order cassettes, and included both alto improvisations and rudimentary concrete works. Among these were the would-be dance album *Kissing Jesus in The Dark*, heavily influenced by Grandmaster Flash, to whose work he had been introduced by David Toop and Steve Beresford, and the series of *Mystery Lab Tapes*, identified only by their cryptic titles and enigmatic catalogue descriptions: *LX/XS* — "spectorian opera epic b/w audiophile pop & snap", *X3/MX* — "various tuneful b/w manish crooners", *GX/EX* — "girlish instructional b/w lushist environment in a low wind"

The *Tapes* were produced in a secrecy which Oswald implicitly maintains to this day. In contrast, his next projects, the vinyl EP *Plunderphonics* (1988) and its CD sequel *Plunderphonic* (1989), both part-funded by the Canada Council, relied upon the listener's intimacy with the object of Oswald's research: namely the (sampled) recordings of The Beatles (long a source for *musique concrète* experiments), James Brown and Michael Jackson, whose appearance on the CD cover (his head on a white woman's body) led to the record's withdrawal and destruction at the instigation of The Canadian Recording Industry Association (without it ever entering a court of law) — and simultaneously assured its place in history. *Plunderphonic* rapidly became a cause célèbre in the myriad arguments over sampling, copyright infringement, artistic integrity and the nature of the recorded object. Unlike Negativland's symptomatically important but cumbersome *U2*, *Plunderphonic* has also become a contemporary classic on purely musical grounds. Were the implications of Oswald's work not entirely opposed to such evaluations, one would be tempted to describe it as a work of genius.

A commission from Elektra Records, to sample and 'deconstruct' material from their archives, was one of the more positive results of the ensuing publicity, though perversely the CD was not released commercially, a handful of copies passing to radio presenters only. More constructive were Oswald's contacts with fellow musicians: though discussions with Metallica and The Kronos Quartet floundered, Oswald produced *Discosphere*, an album of soundtracks for choreographic works for Chris Cutler's ReR label, and *Plexure*, a virginitous descent into the maelstrom of contemporary pop for John Zorn's Avant label. Both showcased his increasingly sophisticated mastery of tape and sampling technology and his heretofore aesthetic sensibility.

His latest release (finished only in July) is *Grayfolded*, an extended investigation into The Grateful Dead's 'Dark Star'. It came about when Oswald was asked to provide introductory music for two Deadhead radio shows. Having no great interest in the potential of radio, preferring the fixed form of the vinyl or CD recording to fugitive broadcasts, he at first demurred. The Dead's Phil Lesh instead suggested that Oswald produce a whole album, drawing on the group's extensive vaults. The result is a time-travelling homage and onyx which subtly blends elements from 51 performances of "Dark Star" into nine dense, interlocking meditations on The Dead's quarter of a century of continuous live jamming.

Oswald isn't the only person to be doing this kind of decomposition: he simply does it much better than most. The only pertinent comparison to be made is with the work of Yashushi Utsunomiya, engineer of the

Japanese group After Dinner, whose 1988 live album *European Tour Souvenir Casette* featured hundreds of edits, jumping back and forth between shows taped months apart. Whereas Utsunomiya's work was a logical extension of his role as mixing engineer, Oswald's starting point here and elsewhere is that of a consumer. His interest lies in the listener's habitual relationship to a given source material, which allows them easy access to his revision.

Plunderphonics in its purest form focuses on one performer, often one performance. At once analytical and recreational, it has a curious neutrality. Does it constitute an act of vandalism, or does it rather reweave (pace the compact disc) the work of performers otherwise consigned to oblivion? Oswald's work obliges listeners not only to respond, but encourages them to take responsibility (in contrast to many of his contemporaries in this field, he avoids repetition of elements as far as possible: "I tend to like things that don't repeat very often because recordings can be so very easily repeated").

An integral part of the structure of plunderphonics is the recurring focus on the act of revisionary listening, whereby Oswald the listener, listening to his own work, is displaced and finally removed from the creative equation. 'John Oswald' becomes a quotation, the singular point at which diverse listeners converge. Just as his improvising required a degree of self-effacement, so too 'plunderphonics' has rapidly become a kind of trademark, its beguiling remaining elusive. Oswald leaves his signature as a kind of valediction, ultimately erasing himself from the performance space. His work reveals an absence of authority, not simply challenging the musical establishment and its audience, but declaring the philosophical obsolescence of all it holds dear.

So far, so postmodern. In the area where hard categories break down, Oswald seeds the emergence of a fertile ground. True to the times, he considers his role as simultaneously both critic and artist, essentially unproblematic: he cites figures like Boulez, Stockhausen and Godard as precedents, but modestly likens his work rather to that of the visual art critic Rosalind Krauss, whose running commentary on the work of the photographer Cindy Sherman likewise constitutes a creative development of essentially raw material, a fantasy about Sherman's photographs. "Without the consent or the collaboration of the source performer, we are doing a take on their material — Krauss's take is divorced by one degree in that it transforms photographs into text. I'm staying closer to the source material, making a collage from it, but in a way that has obvious critical elements about it."

His own work is now being taken up and quoted by people like Michel Côté, BOB State and doubtless dozens of anonymous domestic practitioners. Their takes won't sound like John Oswald, but then plunderphonics was never intended to sound like John Oswald either.

He recently gave an 'illustrated' lecture at London's Disobey club. After he played his 15 second *reductio ad absurdum* of Naked City, Z, someone asked, "Why make something that sounds just like Naked City?" It's a question which entirely, profoundly, deeply misses the point. By underlining the primacy of recording, Oswald exposes its essentially metaphorical status. Even at its most transparent, his stuff doesn't really sound like anybody. It sounds like likeness. □

Grayfolded is released on Swell/Artfact (S/A 1989) (available from Terrapin Trucking, 081 292 0085). Z features on the latest ReR Quarterly CD (ReR 0401) (available through ReR Recommended and These).



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CD LR 163 SAKIS PAPADIMITRIOU PIANO ORACLES

Recorded live at Le Mans European Jazz Festival in 1988 and in Athens' studio in 1987 this CD combines the material from two LPs previously released as LR 128 "First Move". The CD features a unique way of solo piano playing by Sakis Papadimitriou, whose piano sounds as koto, zither, lute or any other imaginable instrument, the music retaining a way Greek feel. Duration — 54:10, notes by George Charonitis.



CD LR 167 ANTHONY BRAXTON/EVAN PARKER/PAUL RUTHERFORD TRIO (LONDON) 1993

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underground resistance



The music of Trans-Global Underground is the unearthly sound of cultures colliding, alternative revolution, sonic seduction and crumbling imperialism.
Story by Rob Young. Main photograph by Alan Powdrill.

Trans-Global Underground: one of the great 90s group names. You can almost hear "in case you hadn't noticed", spoken under the breath after it. As local communities shrink to be replaced by globe-wide, polymorphic networks, the name encapsulates the surprise, the excitement, of cultures opening up to one another where previously they were hidden. You can get that feeling on a crowded weekend in Camden Town, or anywhere in which a culture that subsists on the literature, music and lifestyle of disenfranchisement and difference is forced to confront itself publicly in thousands of mirror images.

"I'm a survivor"

— "International Times", Trans-Global Underground

In a cafe in the heart of West London, surrounded by heavily amplified steel bands warming up for the coming weekend's Notting Hill Carnival, Count Dubulah, the bass player, programmer and part producer of Trans-Global Underground, slowly sheds the skin of a serpentine hangover. It's not just last night's party to blame. As his arteries fill with good Portobello caffeine, he's recounting the hard labour that's meant the group has been heard round the world in less than two years.

"I still can't get used to the fact that anything's happening at all. Some of us are a bit taken aback by how fast this is going. We have to slow it down for ourselves, because it's nervous breakdowns all round at the rate we're going."

It should be there — true enough. The course of insurrectionary popular music ran dry somewhere in the early 80s, a victim of the decade's other priorities. Punk gave way to funk (in its original meaning of a state of fear), and pop music inhaled little more than a riot of fun that took the piss out of history and campaigned for the anarchy of consumer choice.

The acts fostered by Naton Records, Trans-Global's label and point of focus, cast the net wider than such explicitly vote-catching initiatives as the ill-fated Red Wedge. They sing of alternative revolutions, achieved not with a typical 20th century Big Bang but rather with a Big Seep through re-education (Fun-Da-Mental), discovery of transcendental mystic spirituality (Loop Guru), and decentering the myth that Western "knowledge" is the fount of all wisdom. A huge task, but one that the label seems determined to attempt even in the face of limited resources and indifference in certain quarters. Perhaps that's why the new Trans-Global album, *International Times*, is so audibly different from *100 Nations*: it's as though, turning away from that first album's global jamboree, you've stepped straight into the fundamentalist gauntlet of Speaker's Corner.

"You're multi-cultural, we're anti-racist"

— "Tu Meri", Asian Dub Foundation

"We've fielded a lot of charges," says Dubulah, "of cultural imperialism, of flirtations, of there not being enough people in the group to justify calling it a 'World Music' group, and the works. I've come to the conclusion you can't win this argument. All the people at Naton come from all over the world, every culture and religion. There are massive disputes and arguments going on all the time. It's quite combative up there. But what comes out of it is hopefully some interesting music."

Although the first words spoken on the new album are "Good things come to those who wait", this isn't an unequivocal fanfare entrance. It's also the promise of delayed pleasure handed out to seduce an electorate, to keep them sweet. And sure enough, a second voice adds, "I guess you and me waited too long." There's an unexpected bitterness motivating Trans-Global's enthusiasm. "It's been bloody miserable for the last 15 years," Dubulah means. "My city, London, has gone right down the tube. People are always unhappy and constantly on the hop, trying to deal with new laws and new taxes, a scarcity of work. I love it — the Tories have inadvertently politicised a whole generation with the Poll Tax and Criminal Justice Bill. Good things don't come to those who wait. Yes, I think that is a form of control. Actually you have to make

“ We make this music because



we like it,

and we think it should be there.”

action. The reason why we're tired is because we've been working like mad trying to get things to happen."

In that great Sufi proto-slacker poem, *The Ruba'iyat Of Omar Khayyam*, the poet repeatedly calls for everyone to get blasted on wine and chill out under a bush with your favourite harp music and partner of choice. Which is fine, until you realise that encouraging the use of alcohol in 11th century Persia was a punishable, revolutionary act. The material of the poem is both deeply seductive and boldly anti-authoritarian. Trans-Global Underground achieve similar cohesion on *Internotational Times*: the samples better integrated into the music's fabric, its intentions more baldly set out. Rather than being tacked on in the final stages of production to add a whiff of exotica to a rhythm loop, the textures seem to have fused at their unearthing. The least successful tracks, in fact, are the worst: "Holy Roman Empire", a rap by TUUP (The Unprecedented Unorthodox Preacher), relies on a few too many archetypes of bloated authority to mark its point, although Dubulah's revelation that TUUP regularly works the UK storytelling circuit sheds a different light on his declamatory rapping style.

All the other members of the group — Natacha Atlas (vocals and belly dance), Attia Aklane (keyboards), Neil Sparkes (vocals and percussion), Man Tu (drums), and TUUP — are absent, recuperating before yet another foray into Europe, and an appearance at Reading Festival that Dubulah is understandably bewildered by ("Keith Chegwin wants us to play a joke on the cleaners at six in the morning"). The workload is welcome but exhausting. For Dubulah, there's production work on a forthcoming Natacha Atlas solo album, remixes of tracks from *Internotational Times*, guest appearances on various other records and videos to be shot. "There's a lot to learn," he says, "and interaction's the only way. But when? When do you get the time?"

When indeed? Trans-Global Underground are notorious for saying yes to most engagements, but it seems that fatigue may cause them to be more selective in future.

"My favourite thing is going abroad to interesting places to do concerts, because I'd do anything to get out of London, and I don't want to see the inside of a studio for as long as I live. We went to Helsinki last weekend, in the equivalent of the Marquee — 'Ramones' written all over it. We met a Tuvan throat singer called Albert. He came backstage, drank our tequila and went away again. Then we collared him and said, 'Come onstage and sing a song with us.' So he did, but he came on halfway through the number, because he got lost. Things like that cheer me up. The next night, [Jah] Wobble and The Invaders were on, and Natacha got up and did a song with them. But I'm not going to trog round the Midwest and be bottled off by a bunch of rednecks. The most racist stuff we ever got was in Essex, anyway."

Dubulah's musical roots stretch back a long way, at 18 he was playing in punk bands, fundraising for the Anti-Nazi League. "It was much heavier then. I remember we had a police escort going to a gig in Whitechapel, because the NF had said they were going to firebomb it." At the dawn of the 80s came the first moment of disillusionment: "I was in a racially mixed band — we wanted to combine rock and reggae and whatever else came along. I came along as the avant garde noise merchant. We had a hell of a time. We signed to a major record label, and after a couple of singles it became apparent that they couldn't promote us, or sell what we were doing. OK, the music wasn't that good, but more importantly, they couldn't sell us because America weren't gonna take us on. Why? Because you couldn't have two black guys fronting the band with three white guys behind." The band, whose name the Count won't reveal, were dropped after the black members refused to ditch the whites to fit the corporation's marketing plan. "This destroyed my belief in the music business, man, I tell you."

Now, 15 years down the line, there's more to be excited about. Dubulah feels off a predictably broad list of current listening preferences — Oumou Sangare, Fairuz, Can, Harry Patch, Hendrix, Algerian rai, The Reverend Horton Heat — and speculates on the possibility of splicing up a track to have Marc Bolan performing with Roland Kirk. "People in Trans-Global really are into an awful lot of music, and film and literature from all around the world, and that's just because it's the kind of people they are. Basically, we want to cross over. Why preach to the converted? We're not into the fact that people have their own little agendas, points to fight. There's only one way to go, which is: end cultural supremacism. People have to go to start learning about each other and talking. If that means a lot of arguments, fine. There's so much ignorance about each other out there."

Back across the road, the interior of the Nation HQ looks like it's been shelled. Everyone's temporarily decamped two flights up while builders redecorate, and the mood, like the internal space, is cramped and jostled. Nation founder and Fun-Da-Mental guru Aki Nawaz, hollow eyed, completes a little business amid boxes of unread faxes, and press officers stagger between piled up empty boxes and members of Loop Guru. Somewhere amongst this creative chaos, the Count performs a chameleon act.

International Times is released on 17 October on Nation Records

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j u k e b o x

Every month we play a musician a series of records which they're asked to identify and comment on — with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear. This month it's the turn of...

BACED (DANNY GREG)



ryuichi sakamoto

Tested by Mark Sinker

A piano prodigy when young, Ryuichi Sakamoto first came to international attention in 1979 with the Japanese electropop trio Yellow Magic Orchestra, whose version of the Kraftwerk synthesiser sound (combined with Sakamoto's firm star good looks) had made them teen idols at home. By the mid-80s, when YMO disbanded after some ten LPs, Sakamoto was pursuing two careers at once. In 1983 he had composed the soundtrack for Oshima's film *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence* (music he himself thought distressingly sentimental). He was also linked — via Bill Laswell — with a trans-continental crew of collision-sessioners intent on developing a music without frontiers (working with the likes of Peter Gabriel, David Sylvian, Youssou N'Dour, Arto Lindsay and Robert Wyatt). Now he employs an ever-widening variety of "World Music" collaborators on such solo LPs as *Neo Geo*, *Beauty* and the new *Sweet Revenge* (WEA), though Sakamoto distinctly lacks the earnestness that such projects can drift into. In the last few years his soundtrack work has begun to outstrip his session work. In particular, he's worked with Bernardo Bertolucci on *The Last Emperor*, *The Sheltering Sky* and *Little Buddha*, as well as on Oliver Stone's *Wild Palms* for TV, and the "theme tune" for the Barcelona Olympics. As I was setting up, he came over and formally apologised in advance for not knowing anything I was going to play him, but in the event he didn't do quite so badly.

TANGERINE DREAM

"Phaedra" from *Tangents 1973-1983* (Virgin)

Tangerine Dream 75, 76? The Orbi Or even B08 Stadel (imitating the beat on the edge of the table)

Were you a fan?

Yes, I listened to Tangerine Dream, but my favourite was Klaus Schulze. Better music! Kraftwerk was maybe close to this area. They started with a general policy of rock, with hand made gear.

They were a direct influence on YMO?

Yes I liked this area. There was another band called Faust. And Can. Can was pretty famous.

YOUSSEU N'DOUR & LE SUPER ÉTOILE DE DAKAR

"Taaw" from *Immigrés* (Earthworks/Virgin)

Sunny Adie?

Someone you've worked with.

Youssou N'Dour. Very old stuff?

It was his first biggish record in this country.

Ah yes [recognising sleeve]. Very different. Recent stuff is more poppy, more conventional.

When did you first meet him?

When we recorded *Beauty* album in New York. B7-BB.

But you'd been on Bill Laswell records that he'd been on?

Really? It's possible!

Laswell used to take the tapes all over the world, didn't he, so you never actually got to meet each other?

That's right. That's the way Bill does. He records so many tracks at the same time, and even he doesn't know which is which. He doesn't decide, until the track gets more ways or directions. He even gave me some unused track supposed to be for Miles Davis! For some reason I didn't use it, but I still keep the cassette!

What's Youssou like to work with?

Very simple. He listened to the track two or three times. He didn't have any material when he walked into the studio. He listened and he took 15 minutes writing words, improvising words, then he went into the studio and sang, two takes, and it sounded perfect. Very simple. The track I wanted him to sing on was a sort of ballad, not a rhythmic track, and that was the first time he sang any ballad. It's called "Diabaram", on my *Beauty* album.

THE BEACH BOYS

"God Only Knows" from *Summer Days: 20 Classic Tracks* (Capitol)

[The record starts jumping! Doesn't matter. It's Brian Wilson]

What did you listen to when you started listening to music? This must be round about the right time.

Actually, I didn't listen to The Beach Boys so much. This is 60's? 66 or 67? Around that time I used to listen to Beatles, Rolling Stones, Kinks — probably started listening to The Pink Floyd, Iron Butterfly, some psychedelic stuff from the Bay Area. And then also I listened to jazz.

So this was before you went to music college [he studied composition at Tokyo's University Of Art]? Were you playing music then as well?

Yes, before. [Chuckles] I was doing a sort of jazz group. Four or five people, students. But we didn't do standard jazz. Just free jazz and bossa nova! Strange combination. Was there a deeper reason for this mix?

No, nothing at all. Doing bossa nova and free jazz sounds like Arto Lindsay now!

MILES DAVIS

"Splat" from *Tutu* (Warners)

Marcus, Marcus Miller on bass? It's Miles. I've heard this. I don't know the track name. 1986?

Yes. So was the Laswell track you had something like this?

The track was supposed to be for Rockit, Herbie Hancock's *Rockit*. That was the style he kept repeating. B2, B3, B4.

But he never did a record with Miles?

Bill Laswell? I don't think so. But Miles was Bill's guru. Laswell was from Chicago and he was working as a roadie when he was 15, 16, and was very poor — and he met Miles, by chance, and somehow Miles liked this boy, which was Bill, and gave him some cash to help him.

CAETANO VELOSO

"Um Canto De Afonso Para O Bloco Do tie tie Ayê" from *Bela Tropical* (EMI)

[Immediately] Caetano Veloso. Is it live? I worked on one of Caetano's solo albums which was produced by Arto Lindsay. I played keyboard on two songs. Caetano is a kind the best melody maker, after people

like [Antônio Carlos] Jobim and Joao Gilberto

You're a big fan of Brazilian music?
I am. [Smiles] Since bossa in high school days I still love Joao Gilberto and Jobim. And Caetano And Arto and I are close friends — and Arto grew up in Brazil, until he was 18, so he has right connections. And of course many Brazilian live in New York, like Nana Vasconcelos

LIPCREAM

"Iri" from Thrash Till Death (Selfish/Pusmort)
[Concentrates very hard for a while]
No idea

They're a Japanese death metal group called Lipcream.
They're new.

Not terribly. It's just such an odd genre. Can you understand what they're singing?

No. I can't catch the words. It's not your sort of music, is it?
No, not at all. But this track, the band is good, except the solo. That guitar solo sounds to me very dated. It doesn't fit this music.

But you've worked with more 'classic' rock people yourself. Like Iggy Pop, Iggy Pop sang on "Risky" on my Neo Geo album. And in the early 80s I produced a Japanese New Wave band called Friction. It was good stuff. There were many bands like that, [NYC] noise bands like Contortions, Mars, Arto Lindsay's DNA. There were many similar Japanese bands. DNA was my favourite. Do you remember No New York, produced by Brian Eno?
That was the best rock album, to me.

But today you don't like noisy guitars?
Not at the moment! It's possible for the future.

MELON

"Quiet Village" from Deep Cut (Epik)

Sounds like Martin Denny. But a cover. By Melon? I heard they were living in London. The girl and the vocalist got married, and had baby, and moved here. They were doing Melon, they signed to Virgin. Late 80s. Then quiet since then.

Martin Denny's a big influence?
Yes. A big source. YMO's first single was "Firecracker" by Martin Denny 1979. He was a cult. Still alive today, in his seventies, in Hawaii.

He's one of several unusual, unique people. In general, Hawaiian culture is very interesting. I have interest in Hawaiian culture, that mix of Western, Eastern, Chinese, Japanese, Polynesian and American. And also that fake image of Asian culture, exotic, typical stereotype image — which Americans created in Hollywood! It's basically lounge music. Cocktail music.

And you've always had an interest in that?
Not deep interest! [Laughs]

PETER GABRIEL (FEATURING L SHANKAR)
"The Feeling Begins" from Passion (Virgin)

[Quickly] Passion. Not [voluntarily] L Subramaniam but his brother, L Shankar. There are three brothers Shankar was on Beauty, and Subramaniam on the Little Buddha soundtrack last year. Shankar does sessions, he's a session musician. Subramaniam is more a traditional player. I don't think they play together.

What do you think of Passion is a soundtrack. Is it how you'd approach it?
It's very different. My way of writing soundtracks is more conventional, more similar to what old soundtrack composers did, like Bernard Herrmann or even Maurice Jarre. Obviously this soundtrack is much closer to what Peter does. If you put his singing on that, it would sound like a Peter Gabriel solo record. I like it a lot. A great album. I even like Passion Sources.

Do you have any sense of what the musicians he uses feel about the way their contributions are put to use? I don't know if you talk to musicians about that kind of thing.

We generally don't talk this way to musicians! Shankar is presumably comfortable with this kind of 'global' pop culture, or he wouldn't go on working in it. But as you say, his brother doesn't do it, so I wonder if some of these musicians don't really approve of it.

When I was working on Shattering Sky, obviously I used a lot of Arabic and North African music. So I was writing a kind of Western music piece, scoring music, and I needed some Koran chanting. I played my score, and one of the CDs at the same time, and by chance they fit-

ted perfectly. So I was using that, before I got the right to use the CD. Then we found out that this CD is sung by real monks, Moslems. And these chants are really sacred. And the score my score was on was a low scene, the couple making love on a huge rock in front of the Sahara. An authority for this Moslem temple checked the scene and refused the use of music, because of its use. So if we had serious conversations with these musicians, maybe we wouldn't be able to carry on!

It's always puzzled me, this undercurrent. If you take someone's music seriously, how seriously do you have to take everything that goes with it?
I have felt a little strange when I heard that Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan was doing remixes, or some dance tracks. I felt strange, because he's a very important figure in Sufism, the Sufis are very serious, religiously oriented people. How come? It's propaganda for Sufism! It's promotion.

KARLHEINZ STOCKHAUSEN

"Gesang Der Junglinge" from Elektronische Musik 1952-1960 (Stockhausen Verlag)
Pierre Schaeffer? Stockhausen? Yes. Which is it?

"Gesang Der Junglinge", with the electronics and the voices, that was its breakthrough. Did you study this kind of music at college?

Yes. I don't remember this piece. My favourite Stockhausen works are the very first electronic pieces, Studies One and Two, from surprisingly early after the war, in the tradition of Anton Webern. I think now that I could almost 'play' it, with a synthesiser! It sounds very old. Like a film by Eisenstein, or silent movies. The times are very different, but it sounds that old to me. I was a big Webern fan at college. There was something very connected, to me.

When compositional techniques are so very strict and abstract, they can't be directly used in soundtracks. Is there something you learnt that you could use?
If I did this kind of music seriously, it would just be a joke. Black joke, if you understand what I mean. In Little Buddha soundtrack there was a scene when they visit the cultural centre in Seattle. And cultural cen-

tres in general are not very cultural, so I used music exactly like this, as a kind of joke. But just improvised on a Prophet V, using a nose modulator. My personal feeling is that 'cultural centre' sounds really dated. What can you learn in those places? African culture? Asian culture? I don't think there's much you get from those places, so that's why I made the joke.

JOHN ZORN/NAKED CITY

"Bonehead" from Grand Guignol (Avant)
That's it? [It's 57 seconds long] Sounds Japanese, or could be German. Or some band from LA. It's more 'multi-cultural' than that. It could be Material. Bill Laswell?

Very close. He lives in Tokyo most of the time.
Oh, John Zorn! Of course! John Zorn is a great saxophone player. One of my favourite albums is the Ornette Coleman cover versions [Joy Vs Joy]. That's Bill Fissell [on guitar].

The singer was Yamatsuka Eye.
OK. John speaks fluent Japanese. He lives in New York and Tokyo half and half. I really like Fissell. He's a great guitarist. Have you heard Zorn's written compositions? For symphony orchestra? I haven't. I can't wait to hear them.

VANGELIS

"Blade Runner Blues" from Blade Runner (East/West)
[Instantly] Vangelis? Blade Runner? Is Vangelis a musician you've followed for a long time?

Just some of it. I like. Not everything. My favourite album of his is called Choro. Not a soundtrack. But he's sometimes too melodramatic.

VLADIMIR COSMA
"Promenade Sentimentale" from Diva (Milan)

[Instantly] Diva? I don't know the title. It's the second on the CD. It's by Satie, but they never say that. Really? By Satie? Are you sure? The influence is so obvious, but it's actually by him?

It's an interesting soundtrack, because the main theme is an item in the story.
I really like it, because it's so diverse. First the aria, then this Satie. Then the New Wave rock sound. □

original scientists

Over the last 15 years,
On-U Sound

has been one of the UK's most innovative and challenging labels,
fusing global dub methodology with studio experiment and a
radical DIY aesthetic. Ben Watson profiles
the roots rebels without a pause.

From its inception, On-U Sound has been a radical label. You can tell from the covers, eye-stretching cut-ups of photographs that judder the vision, inducing a weird, Dadaistic vertigo. Although personnel are listed, they often have strange, alien names: Borjio 'I', Kishi, Lizard, Eskimo. A mainstream rock album generally represents the group in some way, members lounge against foliage or a brick wall (depending on which chic — pastoral or urban — is in vogue). Current Techno or Ambient comes wrapped in trippy computer images or digital circuitry, packaging as comfortably predictable as the geekish studio shots that adorn classical releases. In contrast, On-U Sound covers look jarring, out of place, like some kind of avant garde challenge to comprehension slipped in among the other merchandise.

However, look closely at who is playing the music and you find some of the heaviest rhythm players in the world. Two Jamaican musicians — Style Scott (drums) and Errol Holt (bass) — underpin On-U Sound's Dub Syndicate releases, just as they do countless chart-topping reggae tunes, while the funk and industrial side of the label's output benefits from the team that helped pioneer rap on the Sugarhill label in the late 70s (ie Keith LeBlanc, Skip McDonald, Doug Wimbish). What is disorientating about On-U Sound is this combination of mainstream power (this is not the music of art nerds 'subverting' scenes they could never get access to anyway) and a rebuttal of commercial streamlining.

And the music? Massive doors slamming in palaces belonging to hundred-foot giants, elevator shafts opening up beneath your feet, militant Rasta warriors surveying Babylon on the wide-screen, stoned mix-jesters terrifying and charming you by turns, dub methodology gorging itself on every music in the world. Heavy Metal guitars, Stockhausen, Punjabi soundtracks, Mississippi blues, anything and everything.

The rave scene going bass heavy with Jungle has suddenly made On-U the sound of the moment, but it has always doggedly pursued dub excellence with nary a nod to fashion.

Steve Barker, who has presented the notoriously eclectic *On The Wire* show on BBC Radio Lancashire for the last 10 years, has long been an ally of On-U's founder Adrian Sherwood. He admires the way Sherwood produces music without bothering with fads.

"I remember sending Adrian HiHop tapes in 1984, when he was doing a deal with LeBlanc to get Double D & Steinski to remix an Akabu track, because he never really listened to HiHop. In 1985/6 I sent him loads of Acid stuff, so he could tune into that and every now and then some ragga.

"He won't know who's supposed to be 'happening' and all that bollocks, because you can't pay attention to all that kind of stuff, you just dilute your style. You can get the same sounds elsewhere, but it's not with rhythm. You can go into lots of avant garde music and go into these chasms, but Sherwood creates chasms of dub. There's a great record by a guy who calls himself Engines Of Myth, Arcane Device, a brilliant sampling album for dub because it's huge shells of electronic noise being cut off, but there's no rhythms in it — and it's the rhythms that pull you back and bend your spine a little bit, make the hair on the back of your neck tingle, what you're looking for in music really. Usually it's like lyrics or particular moods or chord changes, there's loads of sucker punches in pop music where you can see it, it's almost like being manipulated, whereas in the best music it just happens."

This is an unfashionable point of view at a time when postmodernism is meant to have collapsed the distinction between representation and reality, when appeals to the 'real thing' are deemed as the most insidious manipulation of all. However, if you experience what Sherwood can do at the controls — when On-U Sound present African Head Charge, Little Axe, Tackhead or Dub Syndicate — you get a taste of what genuine dub can deliver.

For Barker, who is an enthusiast for pre-war blues, there is a political dimension to On-U's refusal to follow trends.

"It was only when I got DJing that I realised there were lots of connections between reggae and blues, it being like a rebel — or working class — music. Blind Willie Johnson or Skip James, those thousands of blues artists, never read any reviews in *The Grammat*



Adrian Sherwood,
On-U Sound founder

Herald, they just read the ads and got a buzz out of it. So there is a natural resistance to that postmodern criticism that you might get from Sherwood. I was always interested in experimental music and I found in dub soundscapes and experiment on a par with what was being intellectualized elsewhere, but had much more spirit and connected physically with you much more than your minimalists or Stockhausen. Dub was based on real tunes that affected people as well. Jah Shaka and the King Tubby dubs of the mid-70s — people doing on four-tracks in a humid shack in Kingston what people would kill to be able to do here.

"What Adrian had was the energy of punk, but it wasn't really punk, it was like that old soul boy/Northern Soul stuff. All of the reviews at the time, by people who wrote for the *NME* or *Sounds* — and now write for *Vogue* or whatever — accused Sherwood of being 'a white boy twiddling knobs in the studio' and that was 12, 13 years ago. On-U Sound is political without having any kind of ideology, which I find attractive. I feel the same way listening to Ornette Coleman or John Coltrane as I do to 'Yabba-Yu Dub', despite the intellectualization which comes with jazz, which I find fairly repulsive. I don't mean this in a patronising way, though it probably sounds like that, but I know what these people are actually talking about. If you come from a working class background in the north of England or in London, I reckon you intuitively understand this music and it still communicates to you."

In person, Adrian Sherwood is friendly and direct, though you can tell that he is wary of grandiose claims and abstract

bullshit. He'd rather produce a killer track than talk about it. When I visited him at On-U's new studio complex, in an anonymous East London industrial estate, it seemed best to ask for biographical details rather than a philosophical exegesis of On-U Sound's struggle versus bourgeois hegemony.

"I was born in 1958 in London, St Pancras. My dad was from Blackpool, my mum was from the Lake District. He was a sergeant major in the paratroopers — he came out of the army after the war and was debt collecting in London. He spoke Italian, so it was all in the Italian community. He became part of an estate agent business and he had, like, three hotels — one called The Adrian, named after me, and one called The Ayland and another one in Streatham called Liam Court, a big famous building. He died of cancer when I was about five, he went bankrupt, his partner got away with something like £65,000 or something, and my mum lost the house, everything. She had to take in lodgers. I was actually born Adrian Brown and I was adopted and turned into Adrian Sherwood. I moved to High Wycombe, where I started DJing when I was about 12, 13, built a system up from hustling at school, discos in lunch hours. We used to make about 50 pounds a week, we were the richest kids on the block. We had a really good speaker system. I actually 'stopped DJing' at the age of 15!"

"It was a mobile disco — pop records, reggae and funk/soul, Tamla, everything. It became a reggae club. I worked with Johnny Walker, Dave Lee Travis, Noel Edmunds, Emperor Rosco. I also worked with famous reggae names, Steve Bernard off Radio London, Judge Dread. I saw Bob Marley at Eddington Sundown, the Ethiopian famine gig, which

The On-U Sound family



“I look at the alternatives and think, fuck it, we’re not doing a bad job.”

a lot of people don't know about. I organised one, all the reggae artists, I think Winston Groovy was the head of the bill and Bob Marley was fifth, with Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer. It was mad times. That was how I started.”

Sherwood started booking studio time, doing his own “hustlings”. He worked for the 75 and Canb Gems labels before founding Hit Run in January 1978. “I started the label with a debt — three or four grand — which at the time, at the age of 19, 20, in 1978, was a lot of money.”

The first evidence of Sherwood's genius at mixing were Prince Far I's extraordinary *Cry Tuff Dub Encounter* albums (four ‘chapters’ in all).

“Originally we had a little crew. My partner at the time was called Pete Stroud — Doctor Pablo he used to record under. We had him and Crucial Tony, Clifton ‘Bigga’ Morrison [now the keyboardist in Jazz Jamaica], we used to overdub Prince Far I's tapes. We'd add a mad angle to make them more interesting to our own ears. We wanted records that made you laugh. A lot of his stuff was very heavy — the heaviest rhythms going — and we'd try to add a bit of spice on top.”

Steve Barker points out that Sherwood was not just copying the Jamaican producers — he was innovating himself. “Adrian was dubbing and dubbing live — which was never a real art up till then. Shaka was doing a sound system and dubbing off plates, but Adrian did it off live musicians. I saw King Tubby and Errol Brown — great producers — but none of them dubbed off the desk. I've been to hundreds of On-U gigs and I've only been to a couple where Adrian was happy with the mix. It's all to do with compression and distortion and getting space into the sound.”

In 1976/7, punk brought reggae overground, with members of The Clash, Sex Pistols and Slits attending Sherwood's gigs. In January 1980 Sherwood toured with The Clash, but broke away to tour Creation Rebel in Europe. He founded On-U Sound in 1981, creating a primal punk-reggae fusion by incorporating members of The

Slits and The Pop Group with Creation Rebel. It was actually Mark Stewart of The Pop Group that alerted Sherwood to HipHop.

“I went to look for Keith LeBlanc because he was the best programmer. The first record we made with a drum machine was called ‘Watch Yourself’ by Akabu, which Steve Beresford had programmed. Tom Silverman of Tommy Boy heard it via Neil Cooper from ROIR. Tom gave us something like \$5000 for the track. I thought, ‘Fucking hell, this is, like, easy.’ Kishi and Mark were saying, ‘LeBlanc's the best.’ I was anti-drum machines myself, but I thought, ‘Fuck it, we're going to make some money.’ I started getting into it so I could dub it up digitally, exactly in time. I said to Keith, ‘Why don't you come out to London, we could hustle ourselves a little label and it'd be a laugh.’ That was how he came over.”

Finally, Skip McDonald and Doug Wimbish also came over, and the four of them toured as Mark Stewart And The Maffia in 1987, and British audiences got a taste of the wildest Black Rock, comparable to Bad Brains and Living Colour's early gigs for a Hendrix-style transcendence of rock/jazz, black/white, power/experiment distinctions.

Doug Wimbish — who has played bass for artists as varied as George Clinton, Mick Jagger and Will Downing — is understandably frustrated at the pigeonholes that musicians and their music are levered into. He warns to my definition of jazz as “musicians defining their own destiny, rather than obeying the dictates of Wynton Marsalis”. His group Tackhead — the Sugarhill rhythm team fronted by ex-Peech Boy Bernard Fowler and mixed by Sherwood — would by this definition qualify as jazz, and if you listen closely to the amount of spontaneous improvisation happening in Tackhead it is certainly not the ‘industrial rock terrorism’ it has been tagged.

“There's a lot of people who are very racist to jazz, because they don't understand what it is,” comments Wimbish. “That's a very hard remark, but it's true.” (Continued on page 72)

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The Incredibly Strange Music books are mondo archaeology for vinyl fetishists.

They exhume a hidden world of plastic where exotic easy listening, modern primitives, suburban astronauts, Bavarian sex symbols and singing psychics co-exist in fabulous Living Stereo. David Toop provides a guide to the delights of incredibly strange records, while on page 44, Laura Connelly meets Juan Esquivel, inventor of the incredibly strange sound of space age bachelor pad music. Illustration by Frances Dove.

Over the past 30 years, every vital conundrum of rock has been unravelled, impaled, dredged, reified and counter-reified. So it, as happened recently, a critic such as Dave Marsh tells you why he believes Neil Young is a *minor* rather than a *major* rock artist, you can be forgiven for yawning sideways toward questions of more compelling import, viz: what is the relationship between heavy black eyeliner and the pagan sacrificial rites of the Incas?

Or how did record producer Neely Plumb, along with Juan Garcia Esquivel and the entire staff of the RCA Victor Music Centre Of The World studios in Hollywood, create the disturbing psychoacoustic illusionism of Stereo Action, whereby sounds hang so tangibly between your loudspeakers that you reach out instinctively to caress them? Or after many years of neglect, why has the black blue comedian Rudy Ray Moore found favour among the tuxedoed Generation X-ers of Manhattan and the nihilist gangbangers of Compton?

None of these mysteries are plumbed explicitly in the two volumes of Re/Search Publications' *Incredibly Strange Music* books but the terrain is mapped implicitly by truckers, loggers, strippers, Hawaiians, Christians, psychics, wrestlers, Satanists, singing cops, sound sculptors, rockabilies, monsters, surfers and people who have yet to discover a talent of any description and seem unlikely to do so in their lifetime. So first things first: how to define the incredibly strange music aesthetic?

Incredibly strange records can be, quite simply, the products of a silent (or vociferously vocal) army of crackpots, bigots and kitsch kommandos. They should be produced by people who believe in

their own work with absolute sincerity and seriousness. Not even a vestigial trace of authenticity should live in their grooves. The final product should fail to match the original intention. The record cover should portray a Utopian, improved or more desirable world — after listening you'll be more relaxed, more spiritual, you'll be fitter, you'll have better sex, perfect your fascist tendencies, play better golf and know how to rescue a big-breasted babe in a leopard skin from a cannibal. They should be the sort of records that could not, in any circumstances, be carried under the arm at any pivotal site of 'youth movement' emergence, ie The Roxy, Shoom, Glastonbury, etc. Some of them may be highly valued and preserved in clear plastic folders by a distant relative you once met and have since learned to avoid.

In a world of definitive judgements and cultural canons, incredibly strange music can be summarised in one word: crap. But not all of it and not really. This is why we like it. Some of us. So, to borrow the title of an incredibly strange but easily found CD of Indo-classical misunderstanding (track titles include "Mad Mod Mood Fugue" and "I Met Bach In My House") by Itayaraaja: how to name it?

For those of you who have been content, thus far, with the work of major artists, but who want to live a little, there are certain guidelines for recognising the genre. A record cover which features large breasts, for example, can be a sure sign of incredible strangeness. Likewise, singing parrots, spacesuited men holding goblets of green and black brandy aloft, Theremin and Moog Synthesizers, men in turbans playing the Hammond organ, animals in underwear, gurus and fanatics of any political or religious persuasion, displaced satirs, accident victims and convicted criminals, jungle drums and any depiction of bamboo, particularly in close proximity to large breasts (sometimes male). And Heino.

Who is Heino, you ask? My sporadic past experiences as a touring musician in Germany were uplifted from grim reality by visits to record shops, all of which stocked quantities of Heino albums. Even a think

tank of David Lynch, John Waters, Russ Meyer and Wes Craven could not have invented Heino. Possibly born as seen, this crooning Bavarian frightener emanates the embalming fluid fumes of a 90 year old teenager. A sex object for the Aryan nations, Heino is never seen without a blond wig, rectangular sunglasses and doggy companions (poodles for the ladies, alsatians for real men). In the realm of toxic album art and poisonous music, he has no rival.

For this reason, I was delighted to find an entire section devoted to Heino in *Incredibly Strange Music Volume Two*, secreted inside a fascinating interview with Jello Biafra. The strength and weakness of the *Incredibly Strange Music* books is their concentration on fan interviews, Biafra's 50 pager being the clear winner. This sidesteps the wildly subjective but rabidly self-aggrandising value judgements of critics, which is a blessing. None of these artists will be winning the Mercury Music Prize and few, if any, will find themselves in the index of the Robert Christgau *Important Encyclopedia Of Revered Music Useful For Projecting Your Obsessions Onto Others*.



PHOTOS: SEVERAL OF SOME OF THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE RECORDS THAT DIDN'T MAKE THE CUTOFF FOR THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE BOOKS WANTED FOR THE COLLECTION OF DAVID TOPOR

That's the good part, then an alternate history of vinyl, as used for eccentric and peripheral arts or the expression of socially incorrect (or excessively correct) notions. The bad part is that fans tend to justify their preferences in self-serving, blindly selective and vague theories (just like the rest of us). Most of them are nutty or not-so-nutty collectors who want to make a point about the worthlessness of contemporary life, official culture, rock mythology, high art, bourgeois conformity and digital reproduction. So they all rush out and buy Yma Sumac albums.

There are far worse things to buy, of course, but the delirious pursuit of seemingly perverse tastes may eventually return 'unhip' music to its original constituency. Thus it is with The Carpenters, who received mountains of hate mail from 'hip' rock fans in the early 70s. In the 90s they can be sold on the crest of a marketing double whammy: as a private, now outed, source of pleasure to those who publicly espoused dirt, dissent, drugs, noise and bad behaviour during The Carpenters' heyday, or as repackaged MOR. Lucky A&M!

Collecting records which the average intellectual salon would deride as neanderthal trash raises some complex issues. At the hot inner core of the incredibly strange music canon is the Exotica

school. Martin Denny, Les Baxter, Arthur Lyman, Yma Sumac, and Elisabeth Waldo. The three male arrangers, composers and bandleaders were all schlocky cocktail lounge musicians, heavily influenced by the George Shearing sound, but pursuing an experimental bent. Baxter worked for Mel Tormé, Nat 'King' Cole, Abbott & Costello and Bob Hope before striking out to search for his own heart of darkness.

He found it by scoring feature films for Roger Corman and producing exotic theme albums for Capitol. Simultaneously, Denny and Lyman were working in a similar vein, both fronting lightweight Latin jazz combos augmented by fake jungle sounds, Afro-Cuban percussion and Asian instruments. Anthropological buzz words for the genre included 'ritual', 'savage', 'taboo' and 'idol'. One of the attractions of Exotica is its pivotal position between the immediate past and the possible future. War in the Pacific had introduced a new set of cultural parameters to America, and in the post-war period suburbanisation and technology



were suggesting a future which combined refuge with expansion. So Exotica was a sexy stereo soundtrack for tropical explorers who moved no further from the 'burb than a polyvinyl loungeer slipped dead in the middle of two hi-fi speakers.

The innate surrealism of these records comes from the naive but very professional way in which they overlaid easy listening renditions of standard tunes with strange instrumentation, stereo effects and exotic backgrounds. Travel was the coming thing, yet fear of the unknown still ran high. Maybe it seemed very sophisticated, cosmopolitan even, to listen to "Softly As In A Morning Sunrise" played on shamisen and celeste. The same desire to throw in a touch of highbrow colouration was transforming country music in roughly the same era, as country was dragged out of the honky tonks and sweetened with strings and choirs.

Personally, I find Elisabeth Waldo more interesting. Her late 1950s music is quite as Hollywood bonkers as the Bollywood bonkers film music of Rahul Dev Burman, but cranked even higher on the crazyometer by Waldo's agenda to rescue "the musical values of the Ancient Americas" and unveil "the mystenes of a vast North American

Empire, silent for centuries." As Dean Wallace wrote in a concert review for *The San Francisco Chronicle*, "The effect was slightly devastating." What it sounds like, more than four decades on, is the kind of music you might expect Charlotte Vale (Bette Davis) to write, had she been a composer, after her trip to South America in *Now, Voyager*.

Funnily enough, the Denny/Lyman combination of slow moving arpeggiated chords, lite rhythms, attenuated melodies of slightly devastating banality and 'nature' sounds, faintly resembles the more formulaic end of 90s Ambient. Other tracks sound not unlike, though not totally like, the kind of music Sun Ra was making in his *Angels And Demons At Play* period, or on early album tracks such as "China Gates", "Sun Song", "India" and "Portrait Of The Living Sky".



Sun Ra fails to rate an index entry in either of the *Incredibly Strange Music* volumes. Also missing are Bo Diddley, Screamin' Jay Hawkins, Swamp Dogg, JB Lenoir and a whole host of incredibly strange R&B artists, here the whole genre begins to smell fishy. In a revision of whitebread culture, Denny and Baxter have been elevated to a pinnacle of individualist, anti-corporate folk art, despite the fact that Baxter recorded for Capitol, Denny recorded for Liberty, both plumbied the depths of colonial fantasies and both have maintained successful careers through to old age. Admittedly, Baxter was reduced to composing for dolphin shows at Ocean World by the early 80s, but this is the kind of thing that professional musicians do.

None of this need detract from their work, which still sounds simultaneously innovative, funny, tacky and pleasurable. But the sub-text of the *Incredibly Strange Music* genre is that art is elitist, thus bad, whereas neglected kitsch is egalitarian and accessible, thus good.

Seemingly, you're not allowed both, or your sense of identity starts to fall apart.

One exchange in *Volume Two* is particularly revealing. Interviewing Robert Moog about the Theremin, V Vale says, "It seems like a very populist instrument, in that you don't need any training." The incredibly stern Robert Moog is having none of this. "Oh, you do need training," he counters. "Actually it's an elitist instrument, because if you compare it to something like a guitar or a ukelele or accordion or piano, there are few people who have the talent to be able to even get a melody out of it."

But let's not be too negative about this. Any book which brings together Bebe Barron with Magma, Louis Farrakhan with The Silver Apples, and Esquivel with John Oswald is a must have. Americana dominates, so let me suggest that serious UK, European and Japanese collectors be consulted in future volumes for more blues, reggie and R&B, more Asian oddities, more Folkways documentary albums, more Euro-trash, more wildlife records, more international peculiarities, more Japanese takes on exotica (S-Ken, The Peanuts and Harry Hosono).

“In a world of definitive judgements and cultural canons,

incredibly strange music can be

summarised in one word:

”crap.”

more rebarbative. Progressive rock, more disco, more avant garde obscurities and more novelty weirdness.

A final thought: those of us who were children in the 1950s were subjected, via radio, to a weekly dose of surreal, incomprehensible and terrifying songs such as "The Laughing Policeman", "You're A Pink Toothbrush", "Teddy Bears' Picnic", "I Taut I Taw A Puddy Tat" and "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" (all available on *Hello Children - Everywhere*, EMI). The final image of Alma Cogan's proto-environmentalist "In The Middle Of The House", a song about a house with a railway track running right through it, can still chill me in sensitive moments. "I'm singing this song in the middle of the house," she warbles, but the sentence is never finished. A train whistles by, leaving Alma, we can only presume, dismembered. A generation grew up with this stuff and then took acid. Draw your own conclusions. □

Incredibly Strange Music Volumes One & Two are published by Re/Search and distributed in the UK by Airlift, 26-28 Eden Grove, London N7 8EP (071 607 5792). A CD and cassette compilation containing some of the *incredibly strange music* mentioned in the books is also available.

We continue the saga of incredibly strange music by meeting Juan Garcia Esquivel, the original...

bachelor in space



Juan Garcia Esquivel has been called many things in his career — the master of Easy Listening, the Mexican Duke Ellington and the King Of Quirk — but his latest nomenclature is the King Of Space Age Bachelor Pad Music. He's one of a number of musicians (others include Martin Denny and Les Baxter) who prospered from the demand for Exotica, mood muzak and futuristic easy listening among middle-American audiences in the 50s and 60s. What Esquivel's music has above the others, however, is humour and style. He was the man who replaced lyrics with vocal "zu-zu-zus", invented the weird, wired world of Sonorama and explored the sonic depths of Living Stereo.

"It's a sense of humour I developed early in my career working for a comedian," he says on the telephone from his brother's house in Jutepec, near Mexico City. "He used to pull my leg and say to me, 'Write music for a Frenchman walking through Russia.' At the time I made those recordings the electronics weren't so developed so I had to improvise with conventional instruments. I created a style that I call Sonorama, which is like kids' sounds." It was a style which was first heard on an album called *To Love Again*, recorded for RCA Mexicana. RCA in New York heard it, liked it enough to give him a contract to record in America and so began a remarkable career.

It's a career that has spanned some 50 years. In his younger days, he lived the rock 'n' roll lifestyle. He was a dashing band leader and looked like a handsome, Latino Buddy Holly in performance he would change his tuxedo a dozen times and would naturally draw the attention of many love-struck groups. "I have many loves in my life," he says. "Music, cars, women and the piano, not necessarily in that order. I was very particular about my things. I always have a late model car and I have been married four times."

Such suave and panache fitted in perfectly with 50s/60s America, especially the animated excesses of Los Angeles and

Hollywood. He would play a chic nightclub called The Melody Room on Sunset Boulevard for numerous weeks and hang out with many beautiful women who he's still coy about mentioning, as well as hobnob with Henry Mancini and Quincy Jones, among others. His musical sense of humour, dynamics, and futuristic use of (pre-synthesizer) instrumentation (including Hawaiian steel guitar twangs, spooky Theremin wails, the weird low resonances of the Buzzbimba and odd pitches of the Ondiole) rendered his music perfect for soundtracking TV and film. During his time in Hollywood he wrote the scores for Hitchcock's *Spellbound* and for the Disney movie *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea*, as well as such TV detective series as *Mognum PI*, *Charlie's Angels* and *Morkorm*. He also composed for The Boston Pops Orchestra and penned advertising jingles for Colgate-Palmolive. Two of his recordings, "Jalousie" and "Sentimental Journey", were used in a memorable Ernie Kovacs sketch to accompany images of remote controlled office furniture and secretarial equipment.

Esquivel has recorded numerous albums in the US. *Other Worlds*, *Other Sounds*, *Four Corners Of The World*, *Infinity In Sound Volumes One And Two* and *Latin-Esque*, which was part of RCA's Stereo Action series. The latter is a testament to Esquivel's perfectionism and genius at arranging instruments for maximum stereo impact. To ensure total separation of sound, half the orchestra were recorded in one studio and the other half in a second studio a block away, the two synchronised by click tracks. Piano and percussion sail from one speaker to another, ethereal voices swell in waves of sound, rattles and shakers drop in from every angle. Not everyone enjoyed Esquivel's unusual sense of sonic perspective, however. "I was very criticised," he says. "Had I followed the opinion of my critics I would have thrown away my pencil and paper and concentrated on my piano."

Perhaps Esquivel's most fitting engagement was his 12 year residency at the Stardust Hotel in Las Vegas. "I had a contract for 26 weeks a year and I can say that people were impressed with my group. I had six musicians and four girls, each girl was of a different nationality. I kept my musicians for a long time. One of my dancers had a skirt with Velcro which you could break and you could pull the skirt so you could see her beautiful thighs," he says.

It's been a long time since Vegas and he's now retired. He's largely unaware that he's becoming something of a heroic figure to a new generation of listeners eager to excavate the obscure and arcane relics of post-war Americana. But with the release of a compilation album of the recordings he made for RCA Victor between 1957 and 1968, called *Space Age Bachelor Pad Music*, he's finding renewed enthusiasm for his music. UK groups such as Stereolab (who actually called one of their albums *Space Age Bachelor Pad Music*) and Tindersticks are big fans as is the creator of *The Simpsons*, Matt Groening, and (inevitably) saxophonist John Zorn. Esquivel is more interested in being able to swim in his brother Sergio's pool, however, as he's been bedridden for a year due to a broken hip. He hasn't lost any of his flirtatiousness either, as he tells me of the two pretty nurses who are looking after him. He seems to be thoroughly enjoying the chance to review his past memories. "When I presented one of my shows in San Francisco, an old lady came up to me afterwards and asked, 'Where are you from?' And I said, 'Some people say I'm from Mars'." □

Space Age Bachelor Pad Music is available through BarNone Records, PO Box 1704, Hoboken, New Jersey 07030 USA. An extended interview with Esquivel appears in *Incredibly Strange Music Volume Two*.

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Dancing In Your Head: Jazz, Blues, Rock And Beyond

By Gene Santoro
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (Hbk)
\$17.99

Written in a regular music column for *The Nation* between 1986 and 1992, the essays and reviews in *Dancing In Your Head* run an ambitious stylistic and interpretive gamut. In a prose manner that's stylish and thought-provoking, Santoro provides the reader with an entry point into musical roads less travelled — and also more well-trodden lanes.

Though most of the pieces are only a few pages long, Santoro manages to pack mountains of detail and observation into them. Arranged without broader sectional partitions, the chapters run as an ongoing string of profiles, record reviews and wide-angle thinkpieces. This, in itself, is an implicit argument for the genre equanimity that permeates the book — music is treated as an inherently wide-ranging subject, and Santoro connects jazzers from Abrams (Muhai Richard) to Zorn (John) with funksters, soul-stirrers, classic rock, country-politan, N'Awlin's traditions, and blues of many colours. He's equally at home dissecting the guitar styles of Clapton, Hendrix and Frisell or trading punches with cultural conservatives from Allan Bloom to James Lincoln Collier.

Some themes stretch beyond the confines of a chapter, none more interesting than the Bloomian issue of canonization. Santoro draws attention to the way music histories are constructed by the music industry, and the way that recordings are used in creating and defending points of view. Santoro's denunciation of Columbia's packaging of the Robert Johnson

In this month's books section: music dancing in your head; and taking a chance on John Cage

box set, for example, sets a strong tone in the first chapter and establishes that he is no detached listener or mere booster, but an impassioned, engaged, and invested critic.

This passion fires Santoro's arguments for lost artists and, almost in the same breath, reassessments of megastars. Check out his two fascinating chapters ('Notes From The Underground' and 'Hidden Histories') dealing with virtually unknown jazz pianists King Fleming (much overlooked Chicago pre-AACM player) and John Dennis, these reconsiderations come just after a group of chapters in which Santoro applies his considerable listening chops to different phases in the life and times of Miles Davis.

Like any aggregation of articles prepared for individual publication, *Dancing In Your Head* has to deal with a few formal problems. Each chapter has an introductory feel to it (well suited to a magazine, repetitive in a book) that's simply inevitable in these kinds of collections. Still, Santoro might have been prevailed upon to retouch a bit more, he updated some of the earlier pieces, perhaps he should have edited them, too. For instance, adjacent chapters on Les Paul start 'Lester Poffus — aka Les Paul' and 'The first time I met now-76 year old Lester Poffus

— aka Rhubarb Red, aka Les Paul.

Still, *Dancing In Your Head* is an important book to have out there. Santoro — who's recently been in the middle of an ongoing controversy with Lincoln Center and the boorish, intolerant Stanley Crouch — is an advocate of hard thinking about great music. We need more of those.

JOHN CORRETT

The Music Of John Cage

By James Pritchett
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS (Hbk)
£30

John Cage's adoption of chance as a method of composition in 1951 violated common sense notions of musical value, he is frequently referred to as a 'philosopher' rather than a composer. James Pritchett, though, really likes Cage's music, and his book takes a detailed look at how Cage composed, in so doing it shows how carefully and precisely he achieved what he wanted.

In many ways, Cage was a victim of his own rhetoric. Like other post-war composers, he felt constrained by romantic clichés about 'expression', and wanted instead a more level-headed look at how music is put together. Pritchett quotes Cage describing his aesthetic attitude prior to the adoption of chance: 'It had nothing to do with the desire for self-expression, but simply had to do with the organization of materials.' I recognized that expression of two kinds, that arising from the personality of the composer and that arising from the nature and context of the materials, was inevitable, but I felt its emanation was stronger and more sensible when not consistently swollen for, but simply allowed to arise

naturally."

However, when Cage discovered Zen Buddhism and its notion of extinguishing personal will and taste, he found a stronger way of putting it, perhaps too strong. Despite talk of "eliminating personal taste", Cage had a firm idea of what he wanted, and worked hard to achieve it. Chance was a method that allowed Cage to present musical materials in static yet unpredictable ways, but he was no nihilist or cynic. If he did not like the results, he changed the rules.

In his entertaining Cage biography *The Roaring Silence*, David Revill's anecdotal approach told us a lot about the trials and tribulations of America's post-war avant-garde. By concentrating on Cage's musical scores — and only bringing in other themes where relevant — Pritchett gives us a better idea of his fastidiousness and daring as a composer.

Cage's compositions still act like so many time bombs at classical music concerts, proposing a whole new method of listening. Pritchett's meticulous examination of Cage's compositional practice helps explain why this should be so.

Although Cage's 1974 essay 'The Future Of Music' proposed an open-minded pluralism that has now become de rigueur in the classical world, his work nevertheless asked pertinent questions about the relationship of art to everyday life — something the hard sell of Michael Nyman and John Tavener evades completely. Postmodern composers occupy the spaces Cage opened out, but maybe it was the opening out itself that was the point. In teasing out Cage's provocative innovations, Pritchett provides a useful corrective to the brittle consumerism of today's classical scene.

REN WATSON

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reel

to

reel

Living through a period when pop culture isn't so much accelerated as positively enervated renders detailed analyses of musical trends almost futile. Why exhaust yourself by tracing the brief history of, say, Jungle when you know that within a year or so a new dance hybrid will have emerged that will consign the music to the sample-ghetto that ragga — the last big dance 'movement' and, like Jungle, one which was stereotyped by the media as being surrounded by guns and drugs — currently inhabits. If you can remember as far back as 1992, ragga was the Jamaican sound that was going to bust the world's music markets open in the way reggae never did. Two years on and apart from Shabba Ranks's ongoing success as the Dean Martin of Kingston, most of the MCs who were around at the height of the hype are either dead or only heard in samples made by spotty Junglists: a case of the grave being robbed just after the funeral.

This sort of superperson rip through the birth, flowering and death of new musical genres creates a number of problems for a business that makes most of its money via acts who've been around for a number of years. For instance, what will happen when the process is so speed-up that by the time the record company gets the product out it's already obsolete?

If you take the film industry and the latest HipHop movie *Fear Of A Black Hat* (pictured) as a guide, then the answer is tedium. Made two years ago but only now receiving a UK release, *Black Hat* follows the adventures of NWA, or Niggaz With Hats, an amalgam of NWA and 2 Live Crew, and is

In this month's film and video section, David

Eimer reviews *Fear Of A Black Hat*; *Momus: Man Of Letters*; and *Main's Reformation*



essentially a rap version of *This Is Spinal Tap*. That would be OK — even though *Spinal Tap* is unlikely to be surpassed — but writer, director and star Rusty Cundieff's film is scuppered by the fact that the targets of his spoof have been overtaken by the passage of time. Who on this side of the Atlantic remembers the inane 2 Live Crew? Their puerile attempts at creating controversy, mainly via obsessively pornographic lyrics, look a little tame now anyway, with the likes of Snoop Doggy Dogg facing murder charges. Things move quickly in the HipHop Nation, and the state of flux defeats any attempts to pin down a stereotype in the way that *Spinal Tap* did. That film had over

two decades of rock 'n' roll idiocy to trawl through, *Black Hat* can only offer obvious, though sometimes amusing, parodies of Hammer and Vanilla Ice. There's nothing wrong with the performances, especially Cundieff's, and HipHop aficionados will have some fun spotting the targets, but everyone else will be bored rather quickly.

Nicholas Currie, aka Momus, is one of those quintessentially English pop eccentrics who used to emerge from the suburbs with monotonous regularity a few years ago. Typically, he's more popular abroad than in the UK, apparently there's a Momus cult in Japan, and no less a personality than Prince is an admirer. Consequently it's no surprise to find that a Finnish TV company has financed *Man Of Letters*, a documentary on the man that features his first foray into promo-land.

Directed by Hannu Puttonen, the film features Currie running through a selection of his whimsical, overly-referential songs while musing on his perennial obsession, sex, with an eclectic bunch of fellow musos. They include Saint Etienne vocalist Sarah Cracknell, Jarvis Cocker of Pulp and Simon Fisher Turner, who composed the soundtracks for most of Derek Jarman's movies. Some of the chat is instructive but Currie is clearly only interested in talking about himself and his 16 year old girlfriend, and much of this snacks of self-indulgence.

The music comes over a little better, despite Puttonen's annoying habit of covering the screen with Momus's lyrics. Currie's strength lies in a deadpan

vocal delivery that recalls Neil Tennant and Marc Almond, even if he's a little too fond of revealing how many books he's read. The music also recalls the camp, electro pop of the early Pet Shop Boys and is fleshed out with neat little orchestrations and the odd, lyrical guitar riff. It's all very polite.

Man are another act who, like Momus, inhabit the periphery of the music industry, but unlike Currie they do so because of the determinedly experimental nature of their music. Dispensing with drums, ex-Loop leader Robert Hampson and his two cohorts have fashioned a sinister sound that relies on abstract guitars and a looping bass that floats through the feedback and noise. The point here is what you're not hearing: the atavistic, bludgeoning riffs of Loop have been replaced by a space and resonance that's led to Man being tagged as Ambient.

The music on *Reformation*, the video of a track off the group's recent album *Mobon Pool*, owes more to Einstürzende Neubauten than Aphex Twin, however. Like those German iconoclasts, Man occupy a position where rhythm and harmony appear only as an ironic counterpoint, and while Ben Urwin's video offers a jarring, kaleidoscopic take on the band, it can't capture the rich textures created by the interplay of the guitars. A case of listen rather than look. □

Fear Of A Black Hat is on general cinema release this month. *Man Of Letters* is released through Creation. *Reformation* is available from Man Information Service, 7 Purbeck Close, Long Eaton, Nottingham NG10 4PF.



watch

Mark Espiner clicks away at the interface between music and interactive media

Jump, Bowie a step ahead? It wouldn't be the first time. 20 years on and Aladdin Kane has become a lad interactive with the best music CD-ROM yet. Loading up the software, I fear another virtual environment with crazy jack-in-the-box surprises aiming to be interactive experiences, as if interactive equals 'press a button to see something nane'. I fear another sound studio mixing desk. I fear the grin of the thin white duke. And I get them all.

But somehow *Jump* really works. The standard interactive fixes — fast becoming clichés — have a new lease of life in the hands of the creative team behind this title. The secret rooms of David Bowie's clinical cuboid tower block give you, among other things, a controllable interview with the man, a peep into the filing cabinet of his personal photos and the opportunity to indulge voyeuristic tendencies. OK, maybe not so hot — but click into the video editing room. Nine hours of outtake video footage from Bowie's latest video plays simultaneously on five small screens, this is a breakthrough in CD-ROM technology. Clicking on one of them makes your edit, in real time, and throws your playing selection onto the main screen. You can save and play back as many edits as you want. The focus this gives to the music is a new experience: the manipulation of the video is exciting in itself, but on your third or fourth edit you begin to make new visual associations and to hear the music differently. This CD-ROM wins, because it gives you the tools to express this new experience in moving pictures — creative and fun.

The 'click and watch' surprise events are either user-led — the

music room consists of mouse-controlled jamming to a jazz loop with scat singer or trumpet — or witty visual jokes. *Jump* turns the mouse potato viewer into a doer, it throws the music under a different light, and, let's face it, that should be the aim of all musical multimedia software.

Was anyone hoping for a multimedia Woodstock experience? Time Warner obviously think so, and have brought out a celebratory CD-ROM, 'using the latest in interactive technology to recreate the festival and the atmosphere surrounding it'. Nice idea to bring three days of peace, love and music to our computer screens, but the CD has nothing approaching interactive flooded toilets or overpriced food — clearly the latest in interactive technology is not quite there yet.

Don't Play Track One, the first title from Day At The Beach Productions, has an interesting history. The company put ads in the national and music press asking for musicians to give them music for their project. After sifting through stacks of DAT tapes they put together a ten track CD which you can use on an audio player as well as a PC.

The first track contains the program data — hence the title. Not surprisingly, the music is varied — after the first listen through it won't only be track one that you 'don't play'. The accompanying graphics look gawky: clearly there is a misguided aim to stay with organic rather than computer-generated images. However, this is a bold move with attitude, and the follow-up is sure to be stronger. You can e-mail them on

76470233@CompuServe.com (or phone 071 233 9924).

South London has been playing host to the more experimental side of multimedia music recently. Cultural Industry's Now You See It festival at the South Bank at the beginning of August hosted some excellent music collaborations and the sister event Now You CD-ROM. It had great potential. Artech presented an Internet cafe with CD-ROM juke boxes, although I didn't see the participating artists launch their MIDI files onto the Internet as promised, and have not yet sought them out (if they are there) on recent Net cruises (let me know if you find anything out there). Unfortunately, it was a case of 'now you see it, now you don't' for the event information console (designed by Studio 2WO and NoHo Digital), which was lifted from the foyer, depriving punters of a visual overview of the event.

Further along the Thames, the Ministry Of Sound launched the multimedia event Zone. While Time Out struggles with the Apple Newton messagepad (how can you trust a machine that reads "music" as "mouse"?), Zone presents good info for wired London clubbers. Live music from Ikon put a spin on the array of multimedia art, virtual reality, Ambisonic 4D sound and the new Metrozone — an interactive guide to London life. Data competed with the dancefloor, and computers made the small step into clubland (with so much dance music spawned from code, it had to happen), setting up a new nightlife dynamic. □

Jump, *Woodstock* and *Don't Play Track One* are available now.



SOUND | c h e c k

October winners:

Bill Laswell & Pete Namlook, Hakim Bey, Death Cube K, Trans-Global Underground, Unty

In soundcheck:

Autechre, AR Kane, George Benjamin, DJ Krush, Faust, *Futurism & Dada*, Jan Garbarek, Laurent Garnier, Charles Gayle, Godflesh, Paul Oakenfield, Pram, Six Finger Satellite, Sylvian & Frapp, Mo Tucker, Mark Anthony Turnage, UFO, Wire, Yello and more.

In brief:

The October club tax dancing in your head

In outline:

Exploring the African bush and UK Jungle



Hakim Bey

WIRE WINNER

electronic currents

Bill Laswell/Pete Namlook

Psychonavigation

SUBHARMONIC SD 7005 CD

Hakim Bey

TAZ

AKROM 314 524014 CD

Death Cube K

Dreamatorium

STRATA 0001 CD

Three releases which provide further evidence of Bill Laswell's pivotal role as arch-exponent of musical miscegenation and trans-generational experimentation.

Psychonavigation is an intriguing if

not entirely unexpected collaboration (given Laswell's recent penchant for forays into Ambient's deepest and darkest recesses) with the the beyond-prolific Pete Namlook. "Psychic And UFO Revelations In The Last Days" succeeds remarkably well, despite the off-putting title, redolent of displaced chthonic longings and hankerings after pseudo-scientific chimera. Tracks featuring Namlook have rarely sounded this desolate and disquieting: synth drones and bleeps reminiscent of Louis and Bebe Barron's *Forbidden Planet* soundtrack are augmented by Laswell's meandering bass lines and stark, sparse drum machine patterns.

Fusing the most indulgent elements of space rock with

snippets of voice samples from Guillaume Apollinaire may seem an utterly bizarre notion, yet "Angel Tech" amply demonstrates the efficacy of such a curious juxtaposition. This is the most absorbing and challenging piece I have encountered with Namlook's name on it, and is certainly on a par with David Vorhaus's most utterly alien soundtracks. Shards of electronic noise, wildly oscillating frequencies and all manner of analogue chicanery initially combine and then collapse into fragments of free-floating sonic debris.

Hakim Bey (Peter Lamborn Wilson) is perhaps best known as the mouthpiece for the Association Of Ontological Anarchy. He's also an intrepid devotee of Chaos, proponent of radical Shinto heresy, and author of a book on angels and demons for Thames & Hudson's *World Of Art* series. TAZ presents readings from Bey with backing from Laswell, Buckethead, Nicky Skopelitis, and Wu Man on the Chinese pipa. "Chaos" cogently demonstrates why Bey receives William Burroughs's approbation against a backdrop of North African-inspired trance music; he recites with mellifluous nonchalance: "I am awake only in what I love and desire to the point of terror — everything else is just shrouded furniture, quotation anaesthesia, she-for-brains, sub-reptilian enema of totalitarian regimes, banal censorship and useless pain."

Bey's primary objective is embodied in his concept of "Poetic Terrorism": An antidote to the mind-numbing dullness of everyday life, it postulates an "exquisite seduction", an inversion of expectations, a displacement of the mundane via the introduction of some extraordinary event. *World dancing in all-night computer-banking lobbies* Pick

someone at random and convince them they're the her to an enormous, useless and amazing fortune — say 5000 square miles of Antarctica. Bolt up brass commemorative plaques in a place where you've had a particularly fulfilling sexual experience."

As with his work with Burroughs, Laswell's music underpinning the text is characterised by a great subtlety of approach; it is never intrusive, in contradistinction to many recent music-backed Spoken Word excursions. Here, the sound shifts effortlessly through numerous styles encompassing Chinese traditional music ("The Tongs") to a sinister Erik Satie meets Andy Panda theme tune ("Amour Fou").

Death Cube K is the anagrammatical persona adopted by Buckethead for this latest US release. Stylistically, it constitutes a radical departure for the masked guitarist; his usual abrasiveness and metallic leanings are almost completely eradicated, replaced by intricate and absorbing post-Prog rock guitar work that sounds akin to a collision between Robert Fripp, Vini Reilly and Jim Plorton of OLD.

Assisted by Laswell (basses, sounds), these five improvised pieces utilise repetitive dronescapes and uncharacteristically delicate playing to achieve a haunting, mantric quality. "Dark Hood" employs a low bass rumble, water dripping in subterranean caverns and echoing, distorted guitar wizardry. On "Land Of The Lost" the displaced and disorienting sound constructions recall Can in the way they conjure a melancholic and utterly unearthly beauty.

JOHN EVERALL

WIRE WINNER

world of wires

Trans-Global Underground

NATION NAT 38 CDLP

It would be a huge mistake to try and judge Trans-Global Underground's music as a life-

affirming feast of cultures. Sure, *International Times* is crammed with beautiful sounds from the four corners of the world, but the way the music breaks down stylistic barriers and erects incongruous juxtapositions in their place is but a premise to the true tenor of the matter. (It is perhaps symptomatic that the dancefloor is the last place which *International Times* seems destined for, whereas an equally heterogeneous record such as Khaleel's *Miss N3r* sounds like a soundtrack to long, hedonistic nights out in Paris, Oman, Bombay, New York.)

The extraordinary, masterly record is the sound of displacement; a troubled picture of the identity crisis which affects most of the cosmopolitan urban world. All through the album, whenever a voice remains in focus, long enough to be more than just a passing face in the crowd, it sings of a longing for rest, plenitude, and of the disarray which being part of a minority can often entail — and isn't the individual the most endangered of contemporary minorities?

References to ancient places of great religious or mystical significance (Sumera, Chaldea, the Roman Empire, Jerusalem) emphasise a sense of quest for one central illuminating tradition. At one point, a recurring Eastern voice talks of "going back to my ancestors." Samples drawn from the American media Babylon are the boulders on the road to this elusive Eden. Hip-hop and dub, the main rhythmic textures, appear directly linked to the oppression which is their context of origin. Arabic and African passages all sound like, or actually are, laments. Only when the Buddhist world and its resigned pessimism surfaces does one feel any release.

"Monter Au Ciel", with its unspeakably beautiful Oriental voice, a sublimated longing for love, gives a unique vision of redemption halfway through the album, but it is a feeble candle in the gloom, and the record ends with "Dog", a cataleptic dub ("One skeleton skankin' on") which suggests a state of terminal, death-wishing anomie. After a couple of listens, the album can seem so bleak that

Further consumer info: labels not named in this column should be available at good specialist retailers or, increasingly, in high street megastores like HMV, Tower and Virgin. In emergencies, contact likely distributors such as These, RTM, Impetus, Recommended, etc. . .

Subharmonic: through These

Axiom, Totem: through Rough Trade retail

Nation, Totes: through RTM/Pinnacle

the first few seconds are sufficient to lower the temperature by ten degrees, a cheerful Black American voice enthuses "Lookie here! Good things come to those who wait." "Yeah," comes the reply, "but I think me and you been waitin' too long." Fade to black. A bottomless groove.

SYLVESTER BALAZARD

WIRE WINNER

United States of mind

Various Artists

Unity

TOTEM CD1 CDLP

This double album is designed to "affirm the multicultural society we live in". It's in-yer-face, unapologetic and highly political, the sound of anger rather than guilt — and hence more fun (provided you know which side you're on, that is).

The accompanying press release disassociates the music from any organised anti-racist or anti-fascist faction, claiming the music will "communicate louder and more clearly than any political party rhetoric or propaganda". Hmm, yes, of course. Although internal squabbles (reported gleefully in the right wing press) have no doubt tarnished the image of anti-fascism, it is clear why politics are here deemed "propaganda": the three organisers are all professional social workers, and political commitment tends to get in the way of funding and careers. This is not to say their efforts aren't worthwhile (funds raised will go towards an anti-racist youth and music project), but it demonstrates the institutional reality that lies behind such 'purist' disdain for the politics of anti-fascism. With coverage of such events as Play's massive Carnival Against Racism restricted to the NME, it seems a pity to start pitting music against politics in this sectarian manner.

Despite such state-funded apoloicism, the music is strong. Trans-Global Underground feature a snorting bass loop resembling a strubbl' nuttering with a diesel engine, piloted by Punjabi soundtrack zither and glitzy vocal chorus,



Dread Zone use the non-PC term 'Indians' for Native Americans, allowing them to cast Hollywood cowboys as precursors to BNP racists. Material underscores a hilarious William Burroughs rap with ironic soul jazz. Aisha Kandisha's wild Mediterranean nearly develops a Specials bass line. Fun-Da-Mental (their very name deconstructs Islamic tradition into something relevant) are their usual urgent, bits-from-everywhere assault. Public Enemy's Chuck D is quite right to sneer at those who fetishise sampling as progressive in itself, but it is hard to see what other method would allow Fun-Da-Mental to combine Asian and Black traditions with such insouciant vigor.

Throughout, engaging amateurishness splashes out like cold water in the face. Credit To The Nation denounce Ice-T's sexism while stealing his riffs, a querulous, Rebel MC-style dancehall infection sparking their critique. JCOO1 combines old soul horns with dub bass to great effect. Zion Train deliver some gorgeously militant dub (a rarity in this post-digital period). Xangbetos and Asian Dub Foundation show that 70s pioneers Suncs Of Arqa were on the right track in combining dub with any music available to inner city youth. Eusebe cross Salt 'N' Pepa with Public Enemy, coming across both snotty and militant.

"Jarring Effects: Nbrick" ends with gunfire and a chant of "Kill the racists." You feel that all participants could do with some political information — "party political" or not — about exactly what the forces arranged against us are, and who our allies might be. Still, there's a fresh righteousness in this music, a sense of indignation, which avoids the manipulation and patronism which can easily taint "politicized" art. The word "revolution" keeps cropping up, as if these people haven't heard word from the Cultural Studies departments that postmodern orthodoxy rules it out. No loss.

BEN WATSON

soundcheck

ACREQ The Dangerous Kitchen: The Music Of Frank Zappa ACREQ (NO NUMBER) CD

A collection of Zappa works performed live in Canada in October 1993 by members of the shapely named L'Association Pour La Création Et La Recherche Electroacoustiques Du Quebec (ACREQ) with conductor Walter Boudreau. My main misgiving about this project is the decision to use classical singers for what are essentially rock based songs. Past attempts at this type of crossover (Te Kanawa, Domingo, etc) tell us that 'purity of tone' cuts no ice (and can even sound ridiculous) in rock or jazz repertoire, unless, as in the case of Beno's remarkably fresh, neo-Baroque restylings of Lennon and McCartney songs, you drastically appropriate the music for your own ends. Yet I suppose some people might get a mild thrill out of hearing a respectable soprano, Paoline Vaillancourt, talk and sing dirty, or be amused by baritone Steven Horst ditching bel canto for Big Bad Wolf routine on "Zombie Wolf". Apart from the opening section where their majestic voices heighten the mock-triumphal mood, it beats me why they even bothered with "Pens Dimension", which is one of Zappa's most onigineable 'sexual satires'.

The instrumentalists fare a lot better, turning in some creditable performances of "Outside Now, Again" (taken at roughly half the tempo set by Pierre Boulez) and both parts of "The Black Page", with all that tricky polymetric writing for drums, vibes and marimba — the hallmarks of Zappa's music. As tribute albums go this one's okay, and Zappa assisted the project up until his death. But in future I'd like to see musicians of the calibre of ACREQ start tackling some of the unheard chamber and orchestral stuff that lies in the Zappa archive.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

Autechre Amber WARP 25 COMP LP

Laurent Garnier Shot In The Dark F COMMUNICATIONS (CD) LP

Beaumont Hannant Sculptured GPR 9 COMP LP

Luke Slater's 7th Plain My Yellow Wise Rug GPR 8 COMP LP

People have been making peculiar claims within my earshot — about the 'genuinely dangerous' nature of dub culture, about how the very act of queuing up and coughing up to spend all night in a hermetic, sensory deprivation environment has been given a new politicised lease of life in the face of Thatcherist gestures like the Criminal Justice Bill. The thought that the two ambiances could be affective upon each other in some way is bleary logic, but at least it's a notion that's informed by the processes of the best Techno, with its disjunctive acoustics and jaggly halos of resonance, its art of paving the air crazy.

The Sheffield duo Autechre have already created a specific 'answer' to the absurd localisation written into the CJB (the prohibition of 'repetitive beats') in the shape of their 'Amr' 45, a dance track without beats. It's not included on Amber, but the 11 tracks that are, which were recorded in odd available moments of respite during lengthy touring, show that their heads were nodding in that direction anyway. Like The Orb's intriguing Pomme Fritz album, it's New Complexity Techno, content to wallow and roll around in the bliss of its own gro movements and cogitations. Some of this is as spine-chillingly rigorous as the output of Finland's enigmatic Sahko label, at other times it's like one of those early medieval ball-bearing clocks: the absorption in watching the mechanism makes knowing the time of day unnecessary.

Everything about Laurent Garnier, from the impossibly suave name to the six-hour DJ sets in Eurotechno

gymsiums, suggests that he should be disappearing into the ever-growing, amorphous mound of surplus France acts, but his first full-length album reveals much deeper hearing than you might expect, given this background. It's the most 'four on the floor' of the cluster of CDs reviewed here, but Garnier has an adept mastery of pace, and never allows this to sound like a collection of strung-out boogie mixes. Maybe it's the way the beats are underlaid with long, far-reaching sounds (as in Jungle, they operate in a different timezone from the rhythm track), in each of these grooves there's a definite sense of a journey undertaken and a goal reached at the end.

Sculptured is bloody weird. Someone tells me Beaumont Hannant's earliest work utilised guitars, in which case this is a step back into that world. Gosh — grille singer, distortion boxes, guitars strangled without irony. Since Hannant excels at chiselling and smoothing electronic sound (see his last album for GPR, *Textology*), it's difficult to understand why he's chosen to fox his pristine surfaces with cotton (rather than steel) wool in this way. If it's to make you question what you're actually looking for in a record anyway, well, yes it does, but so does the Jeff Buckley album *Hell*, so does *Lead Zeppelin Remasters*.

Seems most Techno whokids need at least one project which allows them to get really stupid, and *Yellow Wise Rug* is Luke Slater's (although calling an earlier album *The Four Corned Room* displayed a nice touch of absurdity). Why 'Yellow Wise Rug', God only knows, I put it to you that Slater's concerned with the way over-determinism can spill into Bedlam (how, for example, you can end up doing silly little things with computer technology, just because you can), and that's part of Techno, too. It's reflected in his titles — and aren't Techno titles the best since bebop? — which read like computer-composed poetry, spewing out wisdom, homily and insanity without any distinction. "Adapt And Go Forth", "Think City", "Boundaries" (fine), but then

"Excalibur's Radars", "Heckle Bag" and "Shapus Amaze" (nurse)

Which brings us full circle. These are records that betray the orthodoxy of the club environment you can still hear yourself think

ROB YOUNG

Jhelisa Anderson Galactica Rush

DORADO DOR D26 COMICLP

Coolio It Takes A Thief

TOMMY BOY TBC 1059 CD

Galactica Rush is an unconventional and disorganised set of music from Jhelisa Anderson, the UK based American singer who once rose high in the national charts with a short-lived group called Soul Family Sensation but chose to veer away from populist success and pursue her left field leanings. Ascertaining any single root or basis for her music is difficult. It partly springs from the grooves between jazz and soul and funk and rap but mostly manages to avoid the tepid clichés of this type of conflation. The opening, title track is the most exciting — an asexual shambles of fluctuating tempos, Greg Osby's scratchy saxophone, intimate words and honeyed keyboards. Jhelisa's voice is warm and broad in the lower register but becomes brittle and nasal higher up the scale, a contradiction of style that is echoed in her music, which frequently combines acoustic instruments with drum machines and samplers. Such incongruity and fusion usually spells lukewarm letdown but Jhelisa's quirky taste and exuberant earth mother personality pulls it together, maintaining a persuasive quality through hymn-like ballads, twisted soul and awry funk.

Coolio is a reformed criminal and drug addict, an eccentric figure with spidery dreadlocks sprouting from his scalp in the manner of a Van Der Graaf generator. Initially from the East Coast but resident on the West for most of his life, his funk-filled cuts are full of the mordant humour of the poor and desperate. With his throaty rapping style accentuating an underlying sense of anxiety, Coolio barks out a series of lunatic tales that chronicle

tragicomic moments of loss of self-respect, pathetic scams, shady deeds and narcotic-related crises Rumbling on behind him is a weighty and melodious production that variously employs the sparse bass of Malcolm McLaren's "Buffalo Girls", the breathy stroll of Al Green's "Tomorrow's Dream", and Lakeside's "Fantastic Voyage". There is a welter of overtly melodious rap music originating from this sunny region at the moment (Snoop Doggy Dogg, Warren G, Dinos and Coolio is undoubtedly of this school, but he differentiates himself by the nervous mania of his in-rehab rhymes and the ambiguity of his persona: "I know last night I robbed my friend," he chatters on "Smokin' Six", "and if that's wrong then call it a sin/But I was broke and broke ain't no joke/And I can't cope without my sniffl").

JAKE BARNES

AR Kane New Clear Child

3RD STONE 01 CD

It's been — how long? — too many years since the indecent sprawl of AR Kane's double "I" album, on which they sounded like they had enough ideas for ten more records. Apparently not. Recorded in San Francisco, *New Clear Child* (ten tidy songs, average length about three minutes, adding up to less than 40) has none of the dibag rock of their previous work — where 'songs' could be mere crystal seconds long or dissolve into long corridor echoes of feedback. In the age of the CD, when they really could sprawl out and dub their sound into myriad facsimiles of itself, they limp off at half time.

They obviously think they've made a *Sefrona* for the Safe Sex generation, but it's more like 69 redone for Julia Fordham fans. If this exercise in Safe Pop was going to work they would need to have gone further — made an indie *Rumours* or *Gauche* or their own *Sister Lovers* — a complete mid-period Crack Up. But the likes of Lindsay Buckingham, Alex Chilton, Nick Drake — or to take perhaps the supreme example, Marvin Gaye at his driftwork and damnation best — knew that behind every sublime

harmonia mundi *Jazz*



PIGPEN feat. Wayne Horvitz, Beggan Krauss, Fred Chelator, Mike Stone
V as in Victim Avant CD, AVANC27



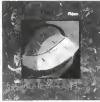
JOE MORRIS TRIO feat. Nate McInnis, Curt Newton,
Symbolic Gesture Soul Note CD: 121204-2



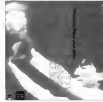
BILL OXON with Willem Parker, Barry Guy, Tony Oxley,
Vade Mearns Soul Note CD: 121206-2



EUROPEAN MUSIC ORCHESTRA
feat. Claudio Fasoli, Kenny Wheeler, Aldo Romano a.o.
Guest Soul Note CD, 121209-2



JOHN LAW
Solo Piano
Talifu Cumi (Meditations On The Dies Irae) Future Music CD: FMRC026



THUNDERING DRAGON
Percussion Music From China,
Wengo-Spectrum CD: SM1519-2



CHRISTIAN WOLFF feat.
Hildegard Kleeb, Roland Dahnden, Dimitris Polisois
For Ruth Crawford HAT ART CD: ARTCD6156



GIACINTO SCELSI feat. Voxnova
Byzantium, The Alchemists HAT ART CD: ARTCD6148

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COMING SOON — Billy Jenkins' classic *Scratches Of Spens*.

fluff of a song have to be silvers of real motivation, bile, excess, revenge, depression, erotic obsession. None of the songs on *New Clear Child* seem to have any such reason to be. In thrall to the idea of A Song, Rudi and Alex can't seem to construct a song to save their life.

The slurred talk (they still sound like Luther Vandross for *The Flowerpot Men* generation) of "sugar kisses" and "saken twirling air" now sounds twee, a conceit, just what we don't need at a time when there's all too much soft talk of 'vibes' in the air. Even the titles sound like parody. AR Kane tries "Tiny Little Drop Of Perfumed Time"? Please! This whole idea of Adults Seeing Like Children Again is profoundly knackered, but — post-postmodern irony, post-Ecstasy — we let indie groups get away with things we wouldn't take from less trendy scufflers.

There are singers who navigate this territory far better, whose work is stained with the lived (therefore ambivalent) sound of adult doubt, Eros, regret, sorrow, they may not be as 'thp' as AR Kane, but they're there. Kate Bush, Stina Nordenstam, One Dove's Dot, Jane Siberry, Rickie Lee Jones. Maybe only women can get close to a real 'womb with a deep wu' music, because only they know that their fabled jouissance is as much a matter of pain as pleasure, of diurnal discomfort as self containment. This is also why AR Kane's 69 worked — because its 'oceanic' drift was all messed up, indistinct, unsettled, shape shifting.

On "Deep Blue Breath" they come close to a real AR Kane sound — with ghostly layers of children's choir and acoustic guitar swathes — and "Gather" is pleasantly jaunty (don't blame me if this stuff sounds like a Betjeman poem), but there's no Song under all this discrete overlaying, just a wisp of an idea of a song. These are gentle, calming, banal songs, without any memorable images — they just scatter a box of old-fashioned AR Kane imagery (skies, cuddles, breezes, flowers) and tidy things up afterwards with studio overdubs. "Surf Motel" samples watersound but it's a drible — which seems to sum this LP up. AR



Kane's notion of the ocean is so idealised — it's barely there, reduced to metaphorical vapour, just a vague blue distance, the slightest breeze on your cheek — pacific to the point of utter passivity.

For the last three songs things pick up a little — as if the drug they've taken has finally kicked in (or the one they were on for the rest of the LP has worn off). "Snow White's World" has some dodgy lyrics that could be James Taylor on E, but it's still the nearest AR Kane get here to the majestic sound of old "Pearl" sounds like it could have come off it, although once again pitchy lyrics threaten to ruin everything. "Sea Like A Child" likewise is offputtingly New Agey but musically the most resonant thing here — a stately spooked-out waltz of synth squeaks, like Sun Ra cleaned up for Saturday morning kids' TV.

Instead of tapping into a secret musical pop-map of California (Van Dyke Parks, Buckley, the Wilson brothers, or the sour-MOR of Van Morrison, Fleetwood Mac, Steely Dan) they've come up with a salt-free AR Kane-lite. The schizo tension has gone from their Pop (I only hope that Clear in the title has nothing to do with Scientology). It's all pleasant enough, but ultimately, as crossover avant garde goes, this makes Björk's Debut sound like Diamanda Galás. This must be the sound that follows blessed-out blissiness. Their only hope lies in a remix, and a severe one at that.

IAN PENFILL

Ascension Five Titles

SHOCK SMO26 CD

Ascension are exceptional all the way. From the first notes you know that these are musicians with a burning need to play. I've not seen them live (Edwyn Pouncey has, and praised them to the skies), and it is possible that they indulge in enough Caspar Brotzmann-style volume to alienate the jazz fan, which would be a pity, because there is improvising depth and grasp here. Stefan Jaworzyn's guitar comes out of Derek Bailey and Andy Gil (Gang Of Four) and perhaps Mayo Thompson (Red

Crayola, Pere Ubu), eschewing cliché and known kicks for exploration of the guitar's physical possibilities. Great guitar twangs reverberate, the sound of a thousand smashing windscreens drummer Tony Irving is right there with him. They open up huge jagged spaces. For the final 26 minute epic Irving takes up guitar too, and there is not a moment wasted.

Jaworzyn proceeds via a kind of stuttering violence which keeps unearthing new sounds and intervals, Irving turns this stutter into boiling rhythms. The only music remotely like this for simultaneous wraparound assault and thoughtful pose is that of New York's guitar marvel Rudolph Grey. While keeping an eye to over-arching coherence, Ascension evince an obstreperous, stop-start sensibility that is very English, very punk (the same sensibility can be found in Tony Oxley, by the way, so this is due to neither 'navety' nor 'incompetence'). This guitar noise desperately needs to reach all those currently being fobbed off with indie jangle and 'Heavy Metal'. In its very extremity it shakes the bars of the free improvisation ghetto it is locked in. Vareseian siren-scapes, Hendrix war zones, Xenakis sound sculptures — they're all here, and sounding fantastic.

DEB WATSON

Bailter Space Tanker

FLYING NUN FNCD 107 CD

Bailter Space Thermos

FLYING NUN EUROPE FNE 32 CD

Bailter Space Robot World

FLYING NUN FNCD 259 CD

The Gordons First Album/Future Shock EP

FLYING NUN EUROPE FNE 16 CD

Bailter Space's passage through life since their inception in 1997 parallels that of many New Zealand bands: loved by an enclave of the press, semi-unknown in the UK but doing all right in the USA. Distribution hiccups have played

Flying Nun: through RTM/Pinnacle

3rd Stone: through Vital

Nimbus: through Nimbus

Mango: through Island

Shock: 56 Beresford Road, London E4 6EF

their part too, but now all their back catalogue has been reassured prior to the release of the new album *Vorturo*.

Baiter Space have few musical similarities with any other bands in the NZ scene — and live in New York now anyway — except that like The Chills and The Verlaines their songs always hint at something greater than themselves. In Baiter Space's case it's more like an out-of-body experience set to music.

Tonker (1987) and *Thermos* (1991) are blueprints of the BS sound, full of strange twisted rackets often based around the simplest of chord changes, with bass and drums restlessly underpinning Alister Parker's atonal, alien guitar. *Robot World* (1993) takes its predecessor's mix of pop melodies and brooding nose to the extreme, achieving an often grotesque intensity. The guitars are the nearest anyone's got to equaling My Bloody Valentine's chaotic cavalry charges of yore. And like that band, the songs sound like they're being buffeted by cross-currents that come from somewhere completely outside the music. "Get Lost" is the standout. It's basically a two chord song hammered to pulp during its six minute duration by riling of unbridled savagery, that just keeps coming round and round, drunk on its own power. The more subdued songs have an austerity that recalls early Can with the focus of 154-era Wire.

This vital back catalogue is augmented by First Album by The Gordons, who were essentially Baiter Space in a much earlier incarnation. Dating from 1981, this

was apparently a strong early influence on Sonic Youth and at the time it must have stood completely alone. It's a bit scrappy but it's full of the young Parker's razor-edged atonal guitar playing that sounds astonishing even now.

DAVE PHOENIXSON

George Benjamin Sudden Time

NIMBUS NI 1432 CD

Over the next few months Nimbus will be issuing a number of Benjamin works, including *Upon Silence* for mezzo and five voices. Meanwhile, we have this superb CD single on account.

Sudden Time has received three performances in London over the last year, quite an achievement in a field where a premiere performance often serves as a validation too. Most recently, *Sudden Time* was heard at the Proms tribute to William Glock, and it was at the Proms that Benjamin first attracted wide public attention. Although he had gained some critical Browne points with an octet and a piano sonata in 1979, it was in 1980, with The BBC Symphony Orchestra's performance of *Anged By The Flot Horizon* at the Albert Hall, that he made his mark — at 20 the youngest composer ever to have a work played at the Proms.

As *Horizon* describes a storm, *Sudden Time* was partly inspired by thunder, perceived by Benjamin once in that limbo between sleeping and waking, where time is elastic and images flow together, stretch apart, and mutate into visual puns on themselves. It's an often dense and busy, always intriguing score, with thematic

fragments flowering, collapsing, then surging together again. Beginning quietly, growing from string sounds that well up gradually, the atmosphere soon becomes more edgy, with frequent percussive intrusions, insistent woodland plants, and roars, grumpies and chuckles from the brass, until eventually the piece ends with thin string sounds diffusing into the air.

BARRY WITHERDEN

Boukman Eksperyans Kalfou Danjere

MANGO 539 927 CD

There are so many episodes in Haitian myth that qualify for instant myth status that it can be seen as a potent alternative to the mighty American odyssey. It's one of the outrages of modern history that a country built on so great a promise could endure such torments, a country of slaves who liberated themselves only 28 years after the United States broke from the British crown, and 61 before slavery was abolished there, and a country whose folklore is such an explosive and intricate blend of voodoo France and West African vigour.

The history of Haiti from the French conquest onward seems to have been one of constant cruelty, with moments of respite mere drops in the bloodstream. Here is a land where oppressive regimes have been the norm. But a pride of often supernatural dimensions characterises the Haitian people, which finds its root in the exploits of the initial uprising and a truly unique identity.

All this matters immensely

because what we have in *Kalfou Danjere* is a mastery picture of Haiti's sufferings, now as real as ever, and of the compassion, the pride and the anger which answer them. It is not such an ambitious ordeal for Boukman Eksperyans to 'modernise' Haitian music: when all the components of 'modernity' — as in Prince and Madonna — are of the same Afro-European stock anyway. Electric guitars, voodoo drums and choral parts combine, often to spin a web of rhythms not dissimilar to Nigerian highlife, but the combination is original. Songs of African pride such as "Zanset Nou Yo" give prominence to the voodoo preservation of that heritage (drums, call and response harmonies, sacred voodoo, all truly underground stuff in Haiti), but it is also present implicitly throughout the record.

Haitian melody is never harsh, more usually soothing and fluid, in the way calypso can be, and it is this quality, this compassion, which Boukman Eksperyans most often inspire. One forgets too often when discussing the validity of the marriage of politics with music that while music is not very helpful when explaining the economics of a Marxist-Leninist society, it can help you shout "Fuck you! I won't do what you tell me!" more convincingly. The title track is just chilling, an incantatory maelstrom in which the lead singer's anxieties find themselves answered by the chorus's mighty cries. "If you're a cheater (Get out of here! If you're a thief (Get out of here!)", and so on. There's ferocious drumming, hard rock guitars, and there's this moment when all stops and the chorus darts. Here are the



out there - a thread through time

FEATURING - ZOVJET FRANCE, HORIZON 222, COIL vs. THE
ESKALATOR, Ø, LORDS OF AFFORD, CHRIS AND COSEY, BLACK
DOG, SECRET AGENT NO1, KAREN X, KOOKIE, RE:SEARCH, FREE
SPACE COMM, PSYCHICK WARRIORS OV GAIA, T&B, UNIT
MOIBIUS, ABRAXAS, GREATER THAN ONE

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people", and chills run down my spine.

One feels humbled to see such courage, defiance and creativity united in one group.

SYLVESTER BALAZARD

Anthony Braxton/Evan Parker/Paul Rutherford
Trio (London) 1993

LEO CDLR 197 CD

Lol Coxhill/Steve Lacy/Evan Parker
Three Blokes

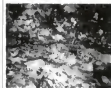
FMP 63 CD

Listening to the music of Evan Parker (common denominator here) is, at times, like breathing the purest of air after a lifetime spent suffocating on farts and fumes. Leo have already released one of the best recent examples of his work: the duo with Anthony Braxton recorded at last year's London Jazz Festival. This set, with trombonist Rutherford added, was recorded a day earlier. Inevitably the addition of trombone makes for a whole other kettle of fish. Though the fleetest of players, Rutherford adds a completely new dimension in terms of pace and phrasing to the wriggling, intertwined saxophone voices of Parker and Braxton. It makes for an absorbing three-way conversation, without the concentration of the earlier album but with its own distinct attractions. Rutherford is a master of the inconclusive, and he throws out brilliantly open lines over the webs and meshes which the other two generate. Braxton and Parker incline towards each other, but respond in their own ways to the trombone. Following all three is demanding fun. Fascinating, if not quite in the rarefied regions reached the following day.

Three Blokes (a title redolent of the carefully down to earth idiom of London musicians d'un certain age) is not a trio album, but three 20-odd minute soprano saxophone duets with a brief three-man closer. The soprano, alone or in packs, can be a forbidding beast and the best of this is the warm, intimate quality of the exchanges. Precedents include Company 1977, when all three

ANTHONY BRAXTON
EVAN PARKER
PAUL RUTHERFORD

TRIO
(LONDON)
1993



Officium
Jon Garbark
The Hilliard Ensemble



Leo: through Cadillac, Impetus, These

ECM: through New Note

FMP: through Impetus, Cadillac

Matador: through Vital

Quigley: through Virgin

Sub Pop: through SRD

Beggars Banquet: through RTM/Pinnacle

Table Of The Elements: through These

took part, along with Braxton, Lacy and Parker's *Craps* album from 1985, and Parker's solo overdubbing on 1991's *Process And Reality*. Recorded two years ago in Berlin, these performances are all gems in their way, each made interesting by the common ground these very different players find as the positions they adopt are dissolved or swapped.

Concentrating on one player becomes about as worthwhile as watching one end of a tennis match. The interchange of intellectual fluids which is the end product, with all the attendant seduction and frayed nerves, is riveting for the listener and provides revealing contexts for all three musicians (Lacy, perhaps, in particular).

WILL MONTGOMERY

Circle X
Celestial

MATADOR LO 091 CD

Low
I Could Live In Hope

QUIGLEY QMS 5 CD

Six Finger Satellite
Machine Cuisine

SUB POP SP 133/330 LP

Circle X have been around a long time: it's taken them 14 years to release a full album's worth of material. Celestial is packed with dense, angular music, relocating the 'hard' in hardcore from the visceral to the cerebral, reveling in studied obliqueness. The most familiar elements consist of crunching guitar riffs, indecipherable wounded-animal vocals and multiple changes of tempo. This is classic post-punk. American art rock, clinging firmly to its underground roots. The nameless angst of 'Crow's Ghost' and the guitar noodling of 'Pulley' do not denote likely mass-market crossover potential. On the other hand, 'Kyoto' and 'Cabin 9 Dub' sound satisfyingly nasty. Circle X try hard to sound evasive, and there's something almost quaint and old-fashioned now about this art for art's sake approach. Hammering the point home, they indulge in 12 minutes of science fiction bleeps and aural collage on 'Little Celestial

Pest' — a bit like The White Album's 'Revolution 9', without the revolution.

I Could Live In Hope is Low's debut album. Everything is slowed down here, mesmerizingly so. It's like the sound of The Cure at their most melancholy (*Faith, Seventeen Seconds*) overlaid with a Sergio Leone soundtrack played at the wrong speed. Chuck in some Galaxie 500 and a mournful Neil Young and what you have is not exactly party time, but it works. Simplicity is the key here: the bass is slow and fluid, joined by restrained percussion, the guitar notes float in space, with individual clarity, and above this the male and female voices harmonise and soar. 'Words', 'Fear' and 'Cut' lead in, establishing this mood before the monumental 'Lullaby' picks up and opens the whole thing out. Then there are the eerie, disembodied vocals of 'Drag' and the snaking guitar patterns of 'Rope' before a bizarre, fragile rendition of 'You Are My Sunshine' closes things off. Stunning.

Apparently Six Finger Satellite began life as an offshoot of a Sprawl Tap covers band. Since 1989 they've been doing the punk rock thing, signing with Sub Pop and releasing a series of EPs. Machine Cuisine, a 10" mini-LP, finds them ditching the guitars and drums and 'experimenting' with other devices. What you get is a sort of Kraftwerk/Suicide pastiche. The returns for the listener are limited and diminish rapidly after the opening track. Whether or not you find the likes of 'The Magic Bus' and 'Hans Pocketwatch' engaging, with their dull rhythm patterns and cool-Germanic accents, depends on how 'clever' you think Six Finger Satellite's appropriation of these elements is. Musical m-pikes are always a dodgy prospect and when they come as artless as this you wonder what the point is: exactly.

TOM RIDGE

Come
Don't Ask, Don't Tell

BEGGARS BANQUET BBQ 160 CD/MC/LP

The case for treating rock music as valid in its own right (and not as part of a media phenomenon,

ersatz politics or as simple sales graphs) inevitably comes down to self-referentiality. If a group don't sound like themselves, and nobody else, the noises generated are automatically suspect: retro, unoriginal, unworthy of attention in the Ambient Age.

Tellingly, Come is a second band (and Don't Ask, Don't Tell a second album) for the two songwriters, Thalia Zedek (ex-Live Skull) and Chris Brokaw (ex-Codene). Abstracted from the nosecore morass of mid-80s New York (and relocated to Boston), Come seem uninterested in the gestural rhetoric of superlatives (slowest, fastest, loudest) which dominated that scene at the time. Desperately introverted, Don't Ask, Don't Tell rightly wants to exist on its own terms — and for the most part, succeeds.

While the stateliness and cyclical plucking of "The German Song" or "Arrive" may indicate a distant kinship with the nocturnes of Rodan, it's obviously only a richly suggestive movement in parallel. As with the much-feted Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, Come seem to have evolved a new kind of blues. Thalia Zedek unveils a series of wails and moans with the bluster of Led Zep filled out. "String" and "Finish Line" ride themselves out on surges of electricity. Come twist guitar harmonics into flurries of blue notes, quietly exulting in the joy of amplification strangely absent from much else going on today. Rock records don't often arrive as musically self-absorbed as this, which only makes Come a band worth treasuring all the more.

JAKUBOWSKI

Faust

The Faust Concerts Volume One

TABLE OF THE ELEMENTS
(NO NUMBER) CD

Faust

The Faust Concerts Volume Two

TABLE OF THE ELEMENTS
(NO NUMBER) CD

Faust's first concert in the UK for nearly 20 years took place at London's Marquee in 1992. Some of the show is on the second volume of these limited edition CD releases, and it's an accurate documentation of their tentative approach that night. A snatch of taped saves, a bit of talking, some clanking metal — they were in no hurry to make an impact. When the set got underway, the stops were occasionally pulled out for a jackhammer onslaught which brought a new slant to *musique concrète* and drove those who were expecting a widescreen version of "Krautrock" back to the bar.

The CD is fascinating, although the band often wander into frustratingly vague territories with their skeletal improvisations. But Faust always were the most wilfully idiosyncratic of the early 70s German groups and here they sound as out of time as ever, happy to bring a drum, a pile of scrap metal, a guitar or two and a bank of malfunctioning homemade keyboards along to make their sound. "Stadtluft" leads from a vocal mantra into a motorik riff with Johann Imrier's keyboards adding clouds of noise. Jean Herve-Peron leaves the best until last, carving up his stage backdrops with a chainsaw. Nothing new nowadays, perhaps, but they did it first, and it

still sounds great. (The downside to all this is that the CDs are only available as expensive imports and this one sounds like an average bootleg recording.)

Volume One documents the group's first reunion gig at the Prinzessbar, Hamburg in 1990, and is better recorded, the sound more physical and the playing more concentrated, with recognizable songs from their back catalogue. As on Volume Two, Imrier is ultra-low profile, audible for long periods and then popping up to play, for example, a long taped segment of Gorlick's *Third Symphony* over an improvisation that may be a statement of sorts but it sounds too easy. A lot of what's produced here sounds like rough sketches, but even now no one scribbles them quite like Faust.

DAVE MORRISON

Jan Garbarek & The Hilliard Ensemble

OFFICIUM

ECM NEW SERIES 445 360 CD

With Gregorian Chant and the so-called "Holy Minimalists" (led by Gorécki and Pärt, the latter a Hilliard Ensemble specialty) racking up very healthy sales in the classical charts, ECM could be onto a strong seller in this superb disc of vocal music of the early European church. The pairing brings Jan Garbarek over into one of The Ensemble's regular stamping grounds, but in many ways it is a logical step in the developmental line which the saxophonist has chosen. In his own music, Garbarek has paried away more and more of the early jazz-derived harmonic

complexity of his work in favour of simple, starkly delineated folk-inspired melodies, delivered with a bold, keen purity of tone and sonority.

Those are precisely the qualities which allow him to blend so well into this evocatively beautiful music, and effectively transforms the format from four voices-plus-instrument to five voices, utilised in various combinations. The saxophonist appears on all but three of the 15 selections, one of which is a solo by bantone Gordon Jones, the others feature the Impid, ethereal Latin (the language, not the groove) singing of The Ensemble, with countertenor David James soaring over tenors Roger Covey-Crump and John Potter.

This is music of staggering beauty, and can overload the ears if taken whole. The centerpiece of the record is Christobal De Morales's 16th century polyphonic masterpiece *Parce Mhr Domine*, which appears in three versions, one purely vocal and two with Garbarek's bewitching lines weaving through the delicate, transparent textures to startling effect. It is the most recently composed work in a selection which begins with anonymous monastic chants and takes in both early polyphony (including the great Perotin, another Hilliard specialty) and Renaissance motets (Dufay and De La Rue).

All the pieces are captured in ECM's usual exceptionally pure fashion in a recording which, as is customary with this source, serves the musical idea rather than some notational ideal of sonic perfection. It will doubtless strike purists as a

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pretitled marketing exercise (not to mention a further "betrayal" of Garbarek's jazz roots), and there may even be some truth in that notion, but when the results are this satisfying, who cares?

KERRY PATHESSON

Charles Gayle Trio Kingdom Come

KNITTING FACTORY WORKS KPW 157 CD

Charles Gayle Quartet Translations

SILKHEART SHCD 134 CD

Charles Gayle Quartet Raining Fire

SILKHEART SHCD 137 CD

The tenor sax master Charles Gayle is the focus of intense interest on the world free scene, and these recordings are certain to cement his growing reputation.

The two albums is a mix of studio and live recordings made this summer when drummer Sunny Murray, now based in Paris, made a rare trip to New York (the ubiquitous William Parker is on bass). Murray's perfectly proportioned style, constructed on a small kit, is in full flower here. Gayle-watchers will be equally thrilled by Charles's recorded debut on piano (actually the instrument he started on). The opening solo track, "Seven Days," finds him transferring his hard-boiled energy to that less pliable instrument, but the trio track "His Crowning Grace" shows a more thoughtful side that embraces his love of Monk yet sacrifices none of Gayle's adventurousness. "Anthem To Eternity," a solo piece which combines the two strains, effectively mixes skittering runs and Messiaen-like atonal chords. His tenor playing on the rest of the album, though hardly without nuance, refers to Albert Ayler's fat, vibrato-heavy tone a number of times, hardly unusual for him but, especially not given Murray's presence. His chiaroscuro bass cannot make only one mid-song appearance on the final track, but it's an extended, far-ranging foray.

Gayle is joined on the Silkheart albums (taken from January 93 studio sessions) by William Parker (bass, cello, violin), Vette Cherry



On-U Sound: through Southern

Silkheart: through Cadillac

Earache: through Vital

Koch International: through Koch

Knitting Factory Works: 47 East Houston Street, New York, NY 10012, USA

(bass, kalimba, bells) and drummer Michael Wimberley in his first collaboration with Gayle (recorded before Knitting Factory's *More Live and Black Saint's Consecration*). Gayle's past drummers have long been the focus of some displeasure on the part of his NYC cult following, but in Wimberley he has an attentive, responsive foil who matches his intensity level without drowning him out or failing into predictable strategies. Gayle's trademark squalling is present, yet there is also a greater emphasis on the more varied sonic explorations he embarks on in live performances.

Gayle has developed into the greatest free player alive now, one of the very few saxophonists worthy of mention in the same breath as John Coltrane. In a way, he goes ever farther than Coltrane, whose later explorations are Gayle's starting point. His totally improvised music lacks themes in the sense of "heads" from which subsequent music takes off — it takes off immediately, like a VTOL jet — but it nonetheless develops with a free-associative logic of its own. It is the sound of the heart and mind and body working in perfect synchronisation so that there is no separation, no line between intent and execution, impulse and action. If Gayle's music is an acquired taste, it is also a road to musical enlightenment.

STEVE HOLTJE

Godflesh Selfless

EARACHE MOSH 85 CD

Considering that many of their contemporaries are busy plating genres into hand-woven wicker baskets, Godflesh might be said to be going against the flow on this new album. On previous releases, they've played the fusion/fission game as well as the rest, soloing the Acid House pulse of "Slacker Humanoid" to the undergarment of "Slavestate" or sampling Public Enemy and Eric B and Rakim's famous James Brown slug-to-the-chest "Funky Drummer" sample for 1992's *Pure* album. A consequence, no doubt, of guitarist Justin Broadrick's solo and collaborative work with (deep

breath) God, Ice, Techno-Animal and Final, and bassist Benny Green's brief stint with Man; the duo seem to have purged their Godflesh incarnation of all extraneous data, and their obvious relish for Hip-Hop, Isolationist Ambience and New Electronica must now find its way into the public domain through other outlets.

Selfless sees the duo polishing up their Metal roots once more, with drum machine ballads nesting alongside purified rock that sounds as imploded as that of The Melvins. "Bigot" lumbers into action, its colossal leadweight guitar motif heaving and sagging in tandem with the drum machine pulse, yet this unstoppable monstertruck of a track isn't quite typical of the album as a whole. "Black Bored Angel" draws a line back through Bob Mould's grim, weatherbeaten solo song "Black Sheets Of Rain" to Joy Division, as if to construct a lineage of primitive, plaintive melodicism out of otherwise formidable punk rock groups, while "Empyrean" is simply haunting, a chain gang slow march graced by electronics. It's one of the few moments where Broadrick's now falible, frail vocals supercede the gargled anguish of previous torture gardens.

JAKUBOWSKI

The Group For Contemporary Music Morton Feldman: String Quartet

KOCH INTERNATIONAL 3 7251 H CD

The Group For Contemporary Music Charles Wuorinen: Chamber Works

KOCH INTERNATIONAL 3 7242 H CD

Death is still the biggest seller. Since Morton Feldman's demise, an apparently limitless number of premiere and re-recordings of his quiet, vast compositions have appeared, his significance growing inexorably in his absence.

Like Cage, Scelsi, even Webern, the idea of Feldman's music sometimes eclipses the music itself. Confronted with its sound, I don't always know how to respond or how the hell to listen to it, especially with regard to the enormously long later pieces such

as this 78 minute string quartet. Of course it isn't a string quartet in the traditional sense, because the strings are used pretty much orchestrally rather than as single lines and counterpoints, there could just as well be three or five or six instruments. Though there is a good deal of activity in the piece, on another level nothing really happens at all, reminding me of the weightless, contemplative atmosphere of Cage's later quartets, only much more definitely patterned and structured, like Webern through a microscope. Aside from that connection, the usual musical references, or any link to even the recent history of the string quartet seem irrelevant.

The experience of listening to Feldman reminds me less of music than of an extended hike through an alien, lunar landscape, full of changing horizons and textures, and points at which two geographical features meet and combine, each giving way to the other, as land to sea. Or a map, a web, a rhizome, a mosaic. In the end it is perhaps more like a desert — a mutual interdependence of unfathomable beauty and unbearable monotony.

Charles Wuorinen's music derives from a more formal, historical and temporal European sensibility. These chamber pieces for string, piano and clarinet soloists and ensembles, composed between 1972 and 1979, unfold gradually and restlessly, densely gestured, full of momentary glances at past and future, and with a definite sense of gravitational pull. Despite Wuorinen's classicism, I detect an unexpected similarity between his pieces and Feldman's — in each

my ear becomes absorbed in an endless chain of unfolding ensemble play, faultlessly conceived and crafted, yet the overall picture remains obscure, continually changing architectural detail against a frame that remains wholly motionless.

RICHARD SCOTT

Ronny Jordan/DJ Krush Ronny Jordan Meets DJ Krush

ISLAND RECORDS IMCD 8024 CD

UFO

No Sound Is Too Tootoo

TALKIN' LOUD 522 271 CD/CDLP

Audio Active

We Are Audio Active

ON-U SOUND 73 CDLP

Not quite an album (it only has six tracks and lacks the lengthy CD pullout sleeve that certifies long player status), *Ronny Jordan Meets* is a collection of the best moments from Jordan's short career (as a black English guitarist specialising in club-orientated jazz), remixed by the Japanese producer DJ Krush. Here, Krush's studio methodology removes the subtle off-key warmth of Jordan's originals and replaces it with unrelentingly austere and mesmeric samples and loops. Though Krush has put out some excellent tracks in the last few years, he derails Jordan's music by clogging up the tunes with cryptic and incongruous sounds. The guitarist's best trick is to lay his intricate playing over a terse backing ("The Jackal" and "Bad Brother" are typical examples worth searching out), but on this production Krush crams in waves of bass, keyboards, more guitar and a

masma of unidentified beeps, screeches and whistles that confuse essentially good tracks.

UFO have a reputation for bringing together old and new sounds and this latest work by the prolific Japanese musicians, producers and promoters contains refined stretches of jazz fusion occasionally tripped up by flashes of HipHop (eg turntable scratches and breakbeats). It's a pretty set of music with only a small vocal input that's entirely devoid of meaning or emotion. The players' skilful instrumentation never strives for anything more than an adroit replication of other artists' achievements (eg McCoy Tyner's). The atmosphere is dense and studious and listening to the recording you can visualise the musicians straining their fingers and furrowing their brows in an over-earnest quest for perfection. UFO's ultra-sophistication creates a delicate and tense two-dimensional sound that if given a good shove would fall over and shatter into little bits, each with a number on the back.

We Are Audio Active (Audio Active being a group of Japanese dreads) is a production from the On-U Sound stable (now based in a brutal East London business centre) and demonstrates the maverick label's current fascination for pursuing the roots methodology into such unlikely outposts as the Far East. As always, the basis is Jamaican dub and its skull-drilling sound effects (police alarms, outrageous echo, crashing cymbals), but the introduction of unfamiliar sounds is what makes this set interesting. Audio Active weave electronic drums, funk

basslines, snippets of HipHop's turntable trickery and Japanese culture into the Caribbean model. Roots reggae has been a source of fascination for Japanese youth in recent years. The Manga generation have thrown themselves wholeheartedly into the lifestyle by cultivating grandiose locks and overdosing on ridiculously large joints. In the same way, Audio Active have been allowed to indulge themselves at the mixing desk and employ the full panoply of dub's mind-bending sound effects.

JAKE BARNES

Keoki

Journeys By DJ

MOONSHINE 8000A CD/CDLP

Paul Oakenfold

Journeys By DJ

MOONSHINE 8000B CD/CDLP

Although it is probably necessary from a commercial standpoint for a DJ mix tape to be structured around the imperatives of a party, it's a shame that the immediate reality of playing for a mixing board rather than a horde of sweaty bodies doesn't prompt the DJ to take more risks. Without a dance floor to respond to and interact with, the DJ can't possibly hope to recreate the club experience at home. Mixology, then, isn't just the inscrutable science of having good taste in music; it is the process of finding connections, of creating inaudible, but perceptible, synaptic gaps between songs, of delaying orgasm, of sustaining surging crescendos of emotion.

On these two mix tapes, instead of erecting a Frankie Knuckles-

What | more | can | you | do ?
| else | **K**

style perpetual pleasure dome or venturing into Walter Gibbons territory by seeking out bizarre juxtapositions, pregnant pauses and drawn-out musical syllables, both America's Superstar DJ Keoke and Stadium DJ Paul Oakenfold are content with resting on their laurels and letting their reputations do the talking rather than their music.

Unlike the first volume in the *Journeys By DJ* series — the hyper-kinetic Billy Nasty mix, which has discernible, well thought-out and well-timed peaks born of rising tension — Keoke's mix merely has shifting tempos and a didgeridoo hook or two. The music coasts along on the same quasi-mystical trance groove for the duration of the mix without venturing into, say, the earnestness of The Arpeggiators, the moodiness of Seefeel or the fragmented rhythms of Spicelab's "Spicecowboy." The textures of Keoke's trance rhythms are compelling, however, as queasy Game Boy FX and wink-wink, nudge-nudge E-cliches rub up against ethnodelic vocal samples and hand-waving keyboard romps. In the end, though, like that old chestnut about 1.2 minute Duane Allman guitar solos, it just doesn't go anywhere.

If Keoke's promise to "surf the clouds of Sheng-Li" fails because the waves don't crest high enough, then Paul Oakenfold's mix splutters and stails before it gets off the ground. Oakenfold's journey is an uncomfortable admixture of dull Progressive House and Euro Pop without the hooks. Bono's pinched falsetto on "Lemon" just doesn't sit very well with Overlords' keyboard stomper,

"Wow! Mr Yogi." Compared with his ruminations on New York's deep House groove on the Ministry Of Sound Sessions mix tape, Oakenfold's choice of both beats and tunes feels forced — a monotony of 303 drudgery and colourless synth washes. There is such a palpable lack of inspiration and energy that you get the feeling that dance aficionados are so hell-bent on preserving their "underground" status that they only want to preach to the converted.

PETER SHAPIRO

Nas Illmatic

COLUMBIA 57684 COMC

Whatever the reason, whether it's the commercial success of LA gangsta rap or the Big Apple's first Republican mayor in living memory, New York's hometown music, especially HipHop, is becoming increasingly dark, introspective and self-questioning. NYC's rappers don't even have the time to do Cali's jheri-curl'd MCs anymore. The beats are becoming increasingly less funky and more moody, more unsure of their role on the record, the whole process of making a record is being stripped bare and re-examined.

After Wu Tang Clan's *Enter The Wu Tang (36 Chambers)* and Jeru The Damaja's *The Sun Rises In The East*, Nas's *Illmatic* completes this year's trilogy of albums that turn New York's HipHop angst into an art form. While Wu Tang Clan project this edgy insecurity outward, Nas and Jeru dwell obsessively on themselves and on their immediate environments. *Illmatic* works as a companion

piece to *The Sun Rises* — Nas's sombre reminiscing lends a sobriety to Jeru's jagged, intellectually violent defence of all things Brooklyn.

Despite the presence of Gang Starr's DJ Premier on three tracks, *Illmatic* lacks the dissonant abstractions that characterised his production of *The Sun Rises*. Instead, Nas's debut is coloured with the wistful melancholia of subdued vibes, heavy organ, Olu Dara's mournful trumpet and yet another "Human Nature" sample. The beats — supplied by Primo, Large Professor, LES, Pete Rock and Q-Tip — have an almost disembodied funkiness. The whole album works in much the same way that Chic's disco did — it is seduced by (and seduces by) the genre's pleasure principle, yet it maintains an untrusting, disbelieving distance at the same time.

Illmatic is riddled with contradictions, which are born of a harrowing confusion rather than intellectual slackness or received ideas and myths. Nas's lyrics brag about how hard one has to be to live in New York, while his tributes to the victims of that same lifestyle highlight its pointlessness.

America's ill-conceived and poorly managed public housing projects are at once a sustaining force that works like an extended family and an inescapable hell. In the useless, menacing "New York State Of Mind" Nas raps, "I never sleep because sleep is the cousin of death", yet most of the album is enveloped by a numbing grass and cognac haze as Nas dreams that his friends aren't dead or in prison.

The lock-up is the album's central

image. Whether behind bars or trapped into a life of scheming by the lure of "dead presidents", the choices made on the album seem inevitable, fated. Even the momentum of Nas's flow is constrained by the very thing he loves — New York HipHop's languorous grooves.

PETER SHAPIRO

Pizzicato Five Made In USA

MATADOR GLE 099 NNR CCR

Pizzicato Five are a Japanese trio, featuring two male record producers (Konishi and K-taro) alongside a singer, Maki, whose honeyed tones echo those of Sarah Cracknell and make comparisons with Saint Etienne inevitable.

Drawing heavily on past/present fusions, *Made In USA* mixes rap beats with harp glissandos. Songs inspired by old musicals rub shoulders with Bacharach and David, Abba morph into Mavis Staples, and Sonny and Cher drift in over Massive Attack.

Where Saint Etienne flaunts such pravity, merrily exposing its seams, P5 sound immaculate. Most of their sampling is invisibly performed (bagpipe swirls excepted); the loops and curls of borrowed melody seemingly improvised afresh, dropped into the mix with only the odd key change or slight shift in tempo to prevent a lawsuit taking place.

This is their vision of America, and probably of the West in general. A cheeky western, their joyful pop gives a gentle poke in the ribs to all who patronise Japanese culture. Crusty

moving. **K**
Keep | still.

semioticians kindly take note) If their way of life is dismissed as a parade of empty rituals, the West can be awarded its own empty signifier — the pristine surfaces of mainstream pop with all its cracks smoothly glossed over

SUSAN MASTERS

Pram

Helium

TOO PURE PURE 41 CC

Laika

Silver Apples On The Moon

TOO PURE 42 CC

One inventive label, two visionary groups, and two very different takes of urban dreaming.

Pram still sound like a Lo-Fi Can. Their music still waves an impromptu take on pop round a jazz junk-shop and their grasp of technology is still deliciously esoteric, running the full gamut from Hawaiian Bubble Machines to the digital sampler. Such mechanical profligacy would usually be the mark of an urban group, literally plugging them into an industrialised grid, but Pram totally eschew the city's logic.

Cries run at a relentless pace, their rootless populations bound by a routine-driven rigidity. If there's a musical expression for this experience then it's surely the manic headrush of 'Arkore Techno with its rhythmic calculus of complex equations. Beside such taxing schemes, Pram's murmured songs administer a healthy injection of chaos theory. Swapping the impersonal for the personal, they turn music back into art and plant the urban streets with beauty.

In Wim Wenders's film *Wings Of Desire*, a trapeze artist laments the closure of her circus, knowing she'll soon have to return to the 'real world' and her grueling job as a waitress. This scene sums Pram up perfectly. From titles like 'My Father The Clown' to the big-top feel of the music, *Helium* celebrates life as a spectacle, a rainbow of potential that disrupts the drabness of everyday life. When 'Blue' drifts dangerously close to new jazz orthodoxy, the smooth lines of the trumpet are quickly broken up, sampled, reshaped and doubled back

Without the sporadic sagginess that dogged their previous album, *The Stars Are So Big*, the structure remains incredibly loose, each instrument seemingly inventing its own role in this sensual, drunken parade.

Where Pram's dreams are a billowing stream of bubbles, floating up over the buildings, Laika's are rooted in the heart of the metropolis. In the process of leaving her previous group Moonshake and forming Laika, singer Margaret Fiedler has retained a jazz rock influence but no longer stumbles through the rougher parts of town. *Silver Apples Of The Moon* has a crisp, sophisticated feel, busting its way through a city centre streaming with percussive layers.

'Sugar Daddy' is superb. Opening with the sounds of traffic and a couple of passing ghetto-blasters, Guy Fisen joins Fiedler on vocals, fashioning a romantic pop song pitched half-way between The Beloved's Ambient soul and the polyrhythmic frenzy of Rp, Rag And Panic.

Throughout the LP, Laika's organic urban jargonism seems tinged with neurosis. The percussion seems so precariously poised that something has to give. On tracks like 'Mamba' and '44 Robbers' the African and Indian instrumentation mages the spirits of other lands, mirages that become positively menacing when augmented by cacophonous bird calls or the rabid brayings of sax-simulated animals. Occasionally the pat-a-cake kookiness verges on the glib, but as reality starts running down their window panes, this seems a minor flaw in a work of impressive genius.

SUSAN MASTERS

Rheostatics Introducing Happiness

SIRE 9362 45670 CD

We seem to have reached one of those periodic — and entirely necessary — impasses in popular music, when the health of the form demands both a rethinking of themes and a spirited deconstruction. That, usually, can be approached in one of two ways: the attempted shedding of what

has come before or the reinterpretation of established styles.

Taking the latter route, Canada's Rheostatics have produced *Introducing Happiness*, a fresh, satirical and entirely intelligent record. This is collage rock at its most integrated, a juxtaposition of influences strung together by ungrudgingly yet somehow seamless arrangements — a little like the surrealism of Zappa back in the days when Flo and Eddie were fronting Big, folk rock harmonies, aggressive thrash choruses, revivalist hymns ('Jesus Was Once A Teenager Too'), pseudo-jazz and even a yodel are part of the palette. The most intriguing tracks tend to be also the most abstract:

'Earth/Monstrous Hummingbird', 'Cephalus Worm/Uncle Henry' and 'Onilley's Strange Dream', but straighter material such as the single 'Clare' or the hyper-speed version of Jane Siberry's 'One More Colour' are not without rewards. Lyrically, a love of things aquatic ('You're such a happening fish, flopping on me') or an understanding of Canadian history ('Ask him if his dog predicts that The Maple Leafs are gonna beat Detroit for The Stanley Cup') might be helpful, but are by no means necessary.

All four Rheostatics both write and trade off lead vocals: very much a group in the truest sense, and the result of nearly 15 years collaboration. *Introducing Happiness* is their fourth release, their second for a major label. It's a decided coming of age, and a testament to sticking to your own, if somewhat peculiar, vision.

BRICH BOEHM

Sa Zna

Eurasia

LEO LAB 001 CD

Akemi Kuniyoshi

ARP Music

LEO LAB 004 CD

Moscow Composers' Orchestra

Kings And Cabbages

LEO LAB 005 CD

Leo Records has been around for 15 years. The label has recently

decided that some of the once-obscure musicians they have championed — Braxton, Crispell, Sun Ra, Cecil Taylor — are now part of a 'mainstream of avant garde'. So, as the formerly little-known swishes away towards the centre, a new label has been inaugurated to promulgate the work of the new, the young, the unrecorded and the unorthodox — whatever's lurking in the rockpools of the margins. Not a bad idea, as the label that brought us classics (see, they've got a point) like Cecil Ty Live In Bologna and Marilyn Crispell's *Gao* enjoys plentiful kudos among the appropriate segment of consumers.

Release number one is suitable enough as a statement of intent. *Eurasia* is the sound of a group of six untrained musicians making music with broken and invented instruments and found objects in the kitchen of a Moscow flat. Heard it all before? Well, far from clod-hopping experimentalism, the group manage to make music of immense coherence out of the junk they work with. Aiming to liberate sounds from their contexts is all very well, but to create such a perfectly meaningless sound world is no mean feat. There is nothing loud or hectic in this improvisation rumbles, silence, koput piano and unusual percussion are the basic elements. Group dynamics are all. What in lesser hands might be a recipe for tedium becomes a living, skulking musical entity thanks to the palpable spirit of interplay present.

London based pianist Akemi Kuniyoshi has already been released by Leo Records, once in a trio with Eddie Prevost and Marco Mattos and once solo. Her collaborators here are multi-instrumentalist Paul Moss (a partnership which goes back 12 years) and percussionist Russell Lambert. It's very different from the above, being a long, contemplative, melodic, musing sort of album. The shapes Kuniyoshi sketches are interesting enough, but too often the album seems to amble along without much sense of development. In the end it's all rather disagreeably placid and apt to melt into the background as the brain is bathed in another

succession of rippling chords.

The Moscow Composers' Orchestra is conducted by another London-based pianist, Vladimir Miller. Over the last couple of years he's been involved with a Russian New Music scene which has increasingly found itself suffering from the lack of cash in punters' pockets. *Kings And Cabbages* is a sprawling four-part composition with extensive improvised elements. It's reminiscent of Bobby Previne in breadth (who, coincidentally or not, has worked in Moscow), though here the synthesis doesn't quite come off. Too often, particularly in the freer moments, it depends on hackneyed vanguard tropes, and a bit more direction and focus wouldn't have gone amiss. The tunes are fine, but too spread out and tenuously connected to have the required shaping effect.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Richard Sinclair RSPV

SINCLAIR SONGS RSC CD001 CD

Back in 1963, at the dawn of British Progressive rock, at the birth of the Canterbury Scene, Richard Sinclair played guitar in The Wilde Flowers. In 1969 he formed, sang and played bass for Caravan, another key reference point in the history of alternative rock. A few albums later he quit and co-founded the highly inventive (and highly whimsical) jazz rock group Hatfield And The North. This lasted until 1975, whereupon Sinclair turned his attention to a small carpentry business in his beloved Canterbury. Camel tempted him back, briefly — just in time to witness the commercial downfall of Prog rock at the hands of punk and New Wave. Then came the wilderness years of the 80s. While former Hatfield mates delved further into uncommercial jazz rock, Sinclair disappeared once again from the professional scene.

To my surprise he re-emerged in 1992 with a solo debut album of new songs based around ecological issues, titled *Richard Sinclair's Caravan Of Dreams*. It was not greeted by a fanfare of critical acclaim, but at least it drew notice that Sinclair was fit and working

again. The follow up, *RSPV*, released on his own label, has evolved from live work in Europe and America. "I don't want this to be one more nostalgic tale", he cautions on the witty opener "What's Rattin'". And thank God it isn't. Past achievements comfortably distanced, *RSPV* is a statement of where Sinclair is at now and a fitting testament to how his musicianship has matured, and also the musicianship of Canterbury celebrities such as Short Wave members Hugh Hopper, Didier Mahlerbe and Pip Pyle, the criminally undersung Jimmy Hastings, the eminently versatile Tony Coe, and former Camel drummer Andy Ward. "Videos", a parody of rowing reporters/voyeurs, showcases Sinclair's deft vocal syncopations, his languorous, yet poignant self-styled scat works a treat on "My Sweet Darlin'" and the breezy "Over From Dover" with its "Girl From Ipanema" grace. The intricate instrumental ballad "Where Are They Now?" is another highlight. Cool jazz meets understated jazz rock and the results are elegant, charming and amusing. Irresistible.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

Dave Soldier Smut

AVANT AVAN 019 CD

Dave Soldier is a guitar player, composer and professional psychiatrist and neurologist. As you might expect from John Zorn's Avant label, his *Smut* is a very strange album indeed. If you've ever wondered what happens when the medieval troubadour tradition meets rock 'n' roll — and who hasn't at some time or other? — *Smut* gives you one sort of answer. 'Jim Hendrix plays the music of Guillaume De Machaut', maybe. And the lyrics are mostly homoerotic songs from the Middle Ages.

There have been some precedents I guess, perhaps Gryphon, a medievalist rock band of Tony Blair vintage. Of course *Smut* is a somewhat more sophisticated affair, with some very clever guitar and brass backings behind the singers. The female vocalist sings the Latin lyrics with a

strong Italian accent, which can't be authentic. But that's better than the blokes, who sometimes sound like The Gumbies.

Joint producer Rory Young says his life's goal is to answer the question, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Maybe he's been reading too much of Harvard philosopher Robert Nozick, but then he got it from Spinoza, I think. But I confess that question is almost as baffling as *Smut*. Vastly entertaining all the same, it maybe doesn't do to worry too much about the artistic credentials.

ANDY HAMILTON

Songhai Songhai II

HANNIBAL HMD 1383 CD

For those who did not pick up on the first Songhai project back in 1989, the central participants were the 'new flamenco' group Ketama, the Malian kora player Touramin Diabate and bass player Danny Thompson. The latter plays a much reduced role this time, while Ketama's former singer Jose Soto gets a solo credit and a number of additional guests are roped in.

"Flamenco ain't nothing but the blues", or so Miles Davis once famously growled to Don Cherry, and if that is a somewhat unwarranted simplification, you can hear what he meant. While ethnic musicians increasingly turn to electric instruments, a rock backbeat or a repositioning of Westernised funk grooves to make their mark in the global marketplace, Songhai remain true to the acoustic and musical roots of their respective traditions.

The fusion is a natural enough one, given both Span and flamenco's strong historical connections with Africa, and more modern influences on both sides of the fence are comfortably absorbed within the music. The vocal traditions of both camps are represented, alongside the delicate interweaving of guitar, lute and mandolin on the one hand, and kora, ngoni and balafon (Malian instruments roughly corresponding with harp, lute and mamba) on the other.

That combination of instrumental

voicings, augmented by double bass (mainly Javier Collina, with Thompson, otherwise engaged at the time of the recording, adding an overdub on three cuts) and embellished by light percussion, creates a seamless, intricate and irresistibly pleasing musical flow that is almost too compatible for its own good at times. Despite that lack of real creative tension, this is another highly accomplished outing for what is clearly a very productive cross-cultural partnership.

KENNY MATHIESON

David Sylvian/Robert Fripp Damage

VIRGIN CAMEL 1 CD

This isn't the first encounter between these two elliptical apostles of silicon lycium but on reflection it's probably the best. For all their professional (and professional) devotion to spectacle musics (Fripp with Proggers King Crimson, Sylvian with Blitz-kid darlings Japan), both men retain an instinctive aptitude for more introspective and contemplative musical discourse. More crucially, their gift is knowing exactly when to kick over the New Age traces of that introspection and make you dance to that discourse.

The cryogenic sense of so much of their music — Ambient for David Lynch fans — doaks the relentless funk of this (allegedly) live album. There's little to suggest a concert ambience beyond the trinity applause sufficing each song, but there's some spontaneity to the playing. The Alphaville bleakness of the musical textures serves to emphasise a stark humanity in Sylvian's mocha flavoured voice in the wilderness. His ponderous synaesthetic wordplay may not be to everyone's taste, but he sounds like he means it. Fripp's guitar, a kamikaze mosquito, alternates Steve Vai metallic melodrama with nails-on-glass abrasiveness, lighting up the compelling cavalry charge through "Danish (The Road To Graceland)" like a distant thunderstorm.

The release comes burdened with the usual ho-hum Sylvian promotional baggage — a limited

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edition gold CD, sleek slipcase, 36 page booklet. I know it's a crass question, but why put together a fine album of lean, searching, visionary music for the 1990s and then go and dress it up like a David Greenlake record?

PAUL STUMP

Mo Tucker Dogs Under Stress

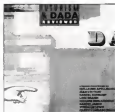
SKYCHIBAN 3103 CD

Mo Tucker I Spent A Week There The Other Night

SKYCHIBAN 3104 CD

Doomed forever to be encapsulated as The Velvet Underground drummer, Maureen Tucker has now made more solo albums than that hallowed group's original incarnation released during its lifespan. The sound on *Dogs Under Stress* is familiar in a loose-limbed way; VU guitarist Sterling Morrison was on almost half the tracks, and Mo herself recalls Reed's shuffling, jangly rhythm guitar style at will. But Tucker, who doesn't drum on this self-produced album, sticking mostly to vocals and rhythm guitar with occasional alto sax forays, has none of the pretensions of her past collaborators. Instead, her plain-spoken (but never banal) lyrics and matching voice convey relaxed wisdom and mature fun. As usual she essays a few enjoyable covers: Bo Diddley's "Crackin' Up" rocks, "Poor Little Foot" sounds like something she could have written, and "Danny Boy" is cracked but mildly charming.

Sky has also reissued 1991's blink-and-you-missed-it *I Spent A Week There The Other Night*, equally recommended, which includes "I'm Not", notable for the inclusion of ex-bandmates Cale, Reed and Morrison, who all appear separately on other tracks (Lou's wife Sylvia did the monochrome cut-out graphics). Bassist Brian Ritchie and drummer Victor DeLorenzo, both in son-of-VU indie rockers Violent Femmes, are also prominent, with all these connections, *I Spent* is one time the Velvets' companion is valid. The muffled, droney VU sound is heard often, and Tucker even covers



(besides The Crystal's classic "Then He Kissed Me"), Reed's VU standard "Waiting For The Man" — an eerily quiet version, more powerful than the pounding original because of its restraint.

STEVE HOLTJE

Mark-Anthony Turnage Drowned Out

BM CLASSICS 7243 555091 CD

This spell-binding collection of four orchestral pieces comes from Turnage's highly successful association with Simon Rattle and The Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. That association shows that New Music can have popular appeal, without dishing up the dregs of minimalism. Not many young composers are lucky enough to have this kind of support, though. As Turnage told Nick Kimberley in *The Wire* 123, "I could take more nks. I didn't have the embarrassment of finding out [the pieces] didn't work at the premiere."

Three Screaming Popes — the contemporary face (or faces) of Expressionism — has already appeared as an EMI single a couple of years ago. *Drowned Out*, inspired by Golding's novel *Pincher Martin*, builds to a terrifying climax before its sudden watery end. The energy and sound world of Stravinsky is a clear influence — as in much of Turnage's music. So is jazz, even if Stravinsky himself decided the music was "masurbation."

The jazz influence is clearest on *Koi*, a memorial to cellist Kai Sheffer. A lot of the material is drawn from an abandoned opera on the life of Charles Mingus — now that would be a fitting sequel to Turnage's recent success with Greek. A macabre transformation of the bass player's "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" keeps threatening to break through. If Turnage is doing some of the most interesting things with the jazz heritage, he's insistent he's not a jazz composer. "I'm reluctant to allow someone to improvise in my music," he told *The Wire*. "They might come up with something that would be incongruous." That old problem Gil Evans and Duke Ellington seemed to get around it, but Mark-

Anthony has been doing just fine with the Rattle band.

ANDY HAMILTON

Various Artists Alphabet City

SUB ROSA/UTPIAN DIARIES SR 72 CD

Alphabet City is a distressed, dangerous area of New York's Lower East Side. This album is described by Sub Rosa as "the violent exploration of a (barely) habitable hell", where the current residents include Gerard Malanga, Elliott Sharp, David Shea, Michael Gra, and members of The Slush Orchestra and Beautiful People Ltd (featuring Jarboe of Swans), all of whom have contributed to this recording.

Malanga and Gra's tracks are spoken, and there are five brief extracts of street noise. The balance of the disc comprises music heavily modified by sampling and electronic processing. It is — like the neighbourhood, presumably — overwhelmingly relentless, intimidating and unaccommodating, but often lively and intriguing.

Slush Orchestra's excellent post-punk power trio tracks, "Assassination Postcard" and "Thank You Sweetie", full of hortatory vocals and lacerating guitar, set the mood if not the style. Next up is Beautiful People Ltd "Warm Liquid Mix", a hypnotic multi-layered construct, with elements that could have been sampled from Steve Reich's *Come Out*, segues into "No Mix", a much heavier variation with added menace, which feels as if it might outstay its welcome, but never does. Sharp follows with four virtuosic, jumbled, still bleeding slices of neighbourhood life. Four is some too many for me, but maybe you like him. Shea's "B C" is packed with cross-rhythms evolving music from Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia, while "Prisoner" is a weird, electronic collage.

Low rents regardless, I don't think I'd want to live there, but I'm very glad I've listened.

BARRY WITHERDEN

DIW: through Harmonia Mundi

Too Pure: through RTM/Pinnacle

Sub Rosa: through Cargo, These

Various Artists Futurism & Dada Revisited

SUB ROSAVAROUND DOCUMENTS SUB CD
012-19 CD

Following its recent Marcel Duchamp release, Sub Rosa continues to investigate art's more radical, renegade exponents with this CD featuring the music of the Futurist and Dada movements. A strange combination, seeing as the Dadaists attacked Futurism in their journals and manifestos as being "a mere propaganda tool." The link between the two, though, is Guillaume Apollinaire, who influenced both but never sided with either 'school'.

The Italians dominated Futurist thought, and tend to monopolize this CD to the exclusion of most other exponents (except for the British Wyndham Lewis, who was a Vortist anyway). The Futurists, of whatever nationality, glorified the mechanised modern world, exalting the machine and marveling at automation. They united under Luigi Russolo's statement that, "We find far more enjoyment in the combination of the noises of trams, backing motors, carnages and bawling crowds than in rehearsing, for example, the *Erco* or the *Pastorale*." But that doesn't make it any more listenable. Luigi and Antonio Russolo built their own Noise Machines — and called them *Intonarumori* — but on the aural evidence here, they produced sounds like a Satanic Pinky And Perky.

The Dada material is more successful on record. Dadaist 'musicians' admired Satie and Schoenberg, and a typical performance was a melee of nonsense, white noise and simultaneous poetry, and later 'brutist' music made with unmusical instruments. However, apart from the famous collaboration at the Cabaret Voltaire in March 1916 between Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco and Richard Huelsenbeck, this aspect of Dada is ignored here. Instead, there are interviews with Huelsenbeck describing the origins of the movement and Tzara detailing its links with Surrealism.

Dada, though, was entirely radical and revolutionary. To its

protagonists, the First World War indicated that human progress was illusory and so art was an illusion too. They questioned the fundamental idea of whether art could still be valuable, and stretched its scope to embrace more 'localised' forms — cabaret, street theatre, recital, exhibition, parade, music hall, circus. Often, though, they merely questioned, rather than promulgating new styles and methods.

Sub Rosa's criteria for inclusion on the CD is somewhat bizarre. Important and influential artists that shaped Dada's characteristics — Hugo Ball, Max Ernst, Jean Arp — are conspicuous by their absence, while Kurt Schwitters, who does appear here, was eventually turned away from the Berlin Dada group for being an unpolitical bourgeois. Jean Cocteau's inclusion is even more incomprehensible despite having some sympathy for the movement, his involvement and beliefs were entirely separate. Even the inclusion of Guillaume Apollinaire is tenuous. Still, these worthwhile recordings constitute an often remarkable historical document, and accurately convey the aims and intentions of Dada — even though the selection here is only the tip of the iceberg.

JOE ROGERS

Various Artists Interpretations Of Monk

DM 395/398 CD

This four CD set in DM's *Live From Soundstage* series documents the masterfully conceived concert at New York City's Columbia University on 1 November 1991, the first major reconsideration of Thelonious Monk's unique legacy beyond a few Steve Lacy albums. Throughout four sets, the all-star band is Don Cherry (trumpet), Steve Lacy (soprano sax), long-time Monk sideman Charlie Rouse (tenor sax), Roswell Rudd (trombone), and Richard Davis (bass), with drummers Ed Blackwell and Ben Riley taking two sets each. Munal Richard Abrams, Barry Harris, Anthony Davis and Mal Waldron fill Monk's piano bench. All four start each set with a solo number, respectively,

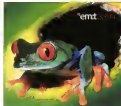
"Crepuscule With Nellie", "Ruby, My Dear", "Monk's Mood", and "Round Midnight". This transcendent album's 23 tunes were clearly rehearsed, making this much more than a jam session.

Waldron's set is the best. His hypnotic style, so often based on turning a particular motif around and around itself, is especially fitted to Monk's music (witness his solo on "Friday The Thirteenth"). He works well with Lacy, since they've often collaborated, and their duos on "Let's Call This" and "Reflections" are among this set's purest highlights. Their attention to Monk's details — a Monk piece is much more than a progression to blow over bracketed by a tune at the beginning and end, it's a composition given significance by seemingly minor facets — are in stark contrast to Cherry's charming but out of context solos (the sometimes fits in better in the earlier sets). It's not generational, since the criminally under-recorded Rudd plays within his own style, yet bats and riffs quite aptly Blackwell's idiosyncratic driving pulse combines with Waldron's full-bodied comping to make a few numbers seem almost like a big band, especially a rousing "Rhythm-A-Ning" and his displaced beats on the closing "Epitaphy" are as much of a joy as what's going on up front.

Barry Harris is a true bebopper, and his set explores the mellow side of Monk most effectively (Cherry gets in his best solo on an evanescent "Light Blue", playing thematically and muted), yet also shines on uptempo numbers. Though Harris is a smoother, more standard player than Monk, he tosses in idiomatic flits and sometimes turns up the heat for spiky solos. It's obvious Rouse feels most comfortable with Harris feeding him, and he delivers a wonderfully warm solo on "Bye-Ya". Blackwell tempers his style a bit and fits well, but I'd rather hear Riley with this group and the modernistic Blackwell with Abrams.

Abrams favours Monk's bluesy, gospel-inflected side, though his comping tends to be tame. Riley's relaxed swing and popping snare accents are such a part of Monk's music: from his tenure in the drum

For the masses? Probably not.



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chair than when Rouse is soloing, it's possible to forget this is a recreation. Davis is unobtrusive yet always supportive, with a fat, woody sound. The highlight is Lacy's unaccompanied "Gallop's Gallop," a complex deconstruction of Monk's most difficult tune.

Davis's solo take on "Monk's Mood" is impressionistic, cloud-like. After that, with the exception of a monolithically arranged horn intro on "Thelonius," his personality recedes. The thorny "Evidence," the down-home "Ba-lue Bolivar Ba-lues-are" and the prototypically Monkish "Well, You Needn't" are all 10-minute-plus strings of solos — but what solos!

Monk was always a perfect whole, yet never predictable. To say *Interpretations* comes as close as anyone else ever has to that ideal is the highest praise.

STEVE HOLTJE

Various Artists Lost In The Translation

AXIOM

Various Artists Emit 3394

EMIT 3394 CD

Lost In The Translation is a record which puts the late Funkadelic guitarist Eddie Hazel, Japanese "blues" singer Liu Soia, Moroccan Gnawa musicians, and other items of contemporary *exotica* to service as fleeting landmarks in an impossible and fantastic theme park ride, where the view is partly obscured by layers of gauze and the desired mode of transport is the digital sampler. The record is one of a number of projects carrying its producer, Bill Laswell, into the melting spaces, elusive echoes and strange perspectives of the Ambient world. The theme park analogy is bastardized from Joseph Lanza's *Elevator Music*, where it was used to illuminate the ethnic and futuristic steals and distortions which characterized the post-war middle-Americana of mood music, easy-listening and cocktail lounge salons. It can also be used to ground a record such as *Lost In The Translation* because here also are sonic concepts and constructs, a total hyper environment that is designed to replace the world



rather than duplicate it.

Like Lanza's book, *Lost In The Translation* is impenetrably enlightening and impenetrable — there are moments of inspiration and startling juxtaposition mixed with periods of indolence and languor. That title might be an ironic comment on Ambient's detractors, and the criticism that by displacing ethnic source musics from their original context and superimposing them in new configurations, their heat, essence and heavy socio-cultural resonance is somehow stripped away, lost. Such acts of decontextualisation are a form of rebirth rather than death, however. The process of uprooting source musics, of allowing them to interact, to blend and bleed with one another, to melt and reconstruct themselves anew, frees them from their vestigial status as isolated and indigenous folk forms. And so they become vapour, to drift as disembodied echoes, and take their place in a world where nothing is solid and the irresistible forces that pull and tug at our lives are invisible, intangible, without borders or shape.

When Ambient music isn't suggestive of terraforming, the construction of new worlds, it is concerned with psychogeography, in uncovering previously invisible lines of mutual confluence and collision. There is a track on *Emit 3394*, a second showcase for the Nottingham-based Time label's Ambient/Emit subsidiary, called "Saguard" by the UK trio A Small Good Thing, and listening to it is like stumbling across a forgotten, buried conduit that bisects Blind Willie Johnson and AFM. The track reproduces the same electroacoustic mix of a heavily amplified acoustic slide guitar resonating over what sounds like a distressed air conditioning unit, that characterized the trio's recent *Slim Westerns* CD (Soliloquium SOL 23). It sounds like John Fahey's *Q Rivers And Religion* as it might be re-recorded for the Muzak system of an orbiting space station circa 3001.

As both a listening experience and an introduction to Time's somewhat disingenuous attempts to distance Emit from the rest of

the UK Ambient community, 3394 is much more rewarding than other recent releases on the label by Wood (Emit 1194) and Qubism (Emit 2294). This might have something to do with the fact that the eight participants on the compilation were only given a track a piece in which to work and so had to compress all their ideas into a single piece of music as opposed to being allowed to indulge themselves (and exclude the rest of us) across the length of a full CD. Several of the tracks seem to proceed from the benign Ambient notion that music can be used to construct a halcyon space that exists for a brief but telling moment to rejuvenate and provide refuge and solace from the hard brutalising surfaces of the modern city. Like an urban green park, the music is an artificial but essential environment, built for rest and seclusion, and beautiful as much for what it omits rather than introduces to the listening environment. In Sine's "What's On Your Mind," for instance, there are no straight lines, sharp angles or hostile technology, and each sound, beat and pulse is muffled in a warm breeze of echo and reverb.

There are other sensibilities at work here too, particularly during David Toop's "Mud And Quartz," where the molecules of the music — rattles, shakers, buzzers — are orchestrated into a state of distressed agitation that returns us, once more, into the heart of darkness.

TONY HERRINGTON

Various Artists Out There: A Thread Through Time

P1TBLP001/002 2CD/4LP

Aside from the fact that it contained some brilliant music, Virgin's *Isolationism* compilation was useful for the way it dissolved some of the bogus oppositions which have been erected within the super-genre of contemporary electroacoustic music by certain over-enthusiastic critics and commentators (and sometimes by the musicians themselves), while creating in the process a space where AFM and The Aphex Twin can co-exist in some kind of

Axiom: through Rough Trade retail

Emit: through Pinnacle

Pt: through Plastic Head

Moving Shadow, Hard Hands:
through Grapevine

precarious equilibrium

Out There: A Thread Through Time is a kind of unconscious sequel to *Isolationism*. It is a far more discreet looking record, released on the small Scottish label Pi, but is equally ambitious in the way it attempts to bring about a rapprochement between a variety of strains and mutations which have developed within electronic music over the last decade and which were previously assumed to be mutually exclusive. Here, then, should you want to look, is where you will find Zoviet France rubbing shoulders with Andrew Weatherall, Coi, Black Dog, The Psychick Warriors Ov Gaia and Chris & Cosey.

The most intriguing tracks appear to be concerned with the construction of simulacra, possible worlds and dark substitutions. Zoviet France's "Synaesthesia" accurately reproduces the sound of a city abandoned to encroaching weather systems and its decaying infrastructure. During Coi's "Nasa Arab" (which is also available as a 12" through the duo's own Eskaton label), the desert sands of North Africa are colonized by a benign techno-tribalism. Abraxas's worryingly-titled "Hannibal Kanton Swine Asphyxiator" details a place of uncertainty where unsourceable drones, beats, eruptions and hums loom in the middle distance, fragmenting and recombining but never getting any closer.

The contributions of OJ Weatherall (working under the name Lords Of Afford), Free Space Comm and T&B (a front for the album's compiler Keith McIvor) are more recognizable in the way they communicate the standard Techno vision of future silicon dystopias. OJ's "Atom" and "Eteen" tracks are schizophrenically strange enough, however, to lift them out of the realm of genre pieces into a cool and minimally furnished space that is already occupied by their earlier *Metr* album (released on the reigning Finnish Sakko label), Immersion's *Oskaloing*, *Autocreation's* *Mette*, and *Surface Tensions* by Pulse. If you were to listen to these last few records in isolation (so to speak) you might come to the conclusion that music has (de)evolved to the point where

all superfluous detail has been scalped out and all that remains is a muffled, motorik pulse and an atmosphere of looming dread.

TONY HERRINGTON

Wire Pink Flag

EMHARVEST 829846 CD

Wire Chairs Missing

EMHARVEST 829858 CD

Wire 154

EMHARVEST 829859 CD

You could take these Wire reissues as a guide to musical movements between 1977 and 1979, when the albums were conceived and recorded: follow perhaps a path from punks infancy — just play and say something — to a difficult maturity — wondering how to play and less sure about just what to say.

The albums make for a good guide because Wire were restless and quick to pick up on new strains and developments. But it would be misleading to describe the band as an exemplar of punk's spit-and-express-yourself base. The sharp songs of their debut album, *Pink Flag*, are more about being ill-fitting than angry. *Any* anger becomes parody — viz, their take on the bilious square-bashing standard "Mr Suit". "Take your fucking money and shove it up your arse."

Elsewhere, the lyrics can seem like the worst type of art school contrivance, the sort of stuff that routinely gains the tag "surreal". "Setting in a surgeon's world, as surgeons will" ("Surgeon's Girl"). This, however, makes some of us laugh. The pleasures in the sound are of the maximum from minimum variety, with shifting rhythms pulling at the compact, laconic songs.

By *Chairs Missing*, a synthesiser was sketching out some of the edgy sentiments, and one track — "Mercy" — was almost six minutes long. The average song-length on the debut was about two minutes, with several less-than-a-minute offerings. Plenty hanging on the numbers, since brevity was almost

a punk principle. *Wire Wire* becoming Prog rockers? Listening to *Chairs Missing* now it's difficult to get into the punk puritan mindset that generated such concerns at the time, since the first thing that hits is the lo-tech, blurred sound. And the album includes that great anthem to social imitation, "I Am The Fly".

154 is the pick of the three. With hindsight, the album was a sign of several things to come, including stark industry and, at worst, the potent clumsiness of the New Romantics. At best, 154 is like listening to a lazy, latter-day take on beguiling glam rock (The Young Ones, say, who come to mind listening to "Single KO"), shot through with an odd, nagging menace. It's some sort of document of that most feared of punk moves — to maturity. A pretty exemplary one, at that — here it means learning more ways to be jugged.

ROBERT YATES

Yello Zebr

PHONOGRAM PROMO CD

As research for this 'dance floor travelogue', did Dieter Meier and Bono Blank, Yello's words and sounds of sophistication, check out the globe's hardest clubs? Not likely. Disinclined to soil their hands going underground, they probably did a grand tour of the world's best hotels, despatching urinals out into the night to bring back choice beats.

The image of comfort and ease which Yello — Meier, in particular — projects is one entirely in keeping with their music. They are proud of their connections with the 'cutting edge' — from Afrika Bambaataa reworking "Bostich" in 1981 to being heralded as the Godfathers of Electro — but they would never suggest anything as uncouth as striving for novelty.

Zebr works in a similar fashion to previous albums. Blank draws on a formidable knowledge of genre, and a deftness at assembling sounds — apparently, he has a catalogue of some 100,000 sounds, named according to potential effect — to create pristine dance dramas, hitting the

desired mood with some economy. Meier's 'singing' is a detached commentary, or a delicate unburdening of feelings. No violent emotion gets into a Yello song.

The way Yello mix and match — a hint of the East here, some reggae there, a touch of brass that shouts Glen Miller — is to toy with kitsch. There are echoes of Malcolm McLaren and his cultural round-ups, prompted by Meier's strolling vocals. The companion only reaffirms the wit and elegance of the Yello way. Blank is so familiar with his sources, and Meier's persona is so persuasive, that Yello's great web of artifice seems perfectly natural.

ROBERT YATES

in brief club trax

Kodwo Eshun thinks hard on Recent Jungle, HipHop and Techno

DJ Shadow/DJ Krush

Lost And Found/Kemuri (PHO WAX PROMO 12") Shadow's new 12" is another classic. Sounding even further off in the distance this time around, its scratches are like a car skidding in sand while a muted 70s organ slows the bass down to a dusted crawl. The martial fanfare of the drums only adds to the elegiac atmosphere which hovers over this excellent record like a blurred memory of defeat. Krush's "Kemuri" has a brilliant effect, something like the processed trumpet/keyboard effect of Jon Hassell's *Dream Theory In Malaysia*. It banks and tilts with a feverish phosphorescent energy that's just great to hear.

Foul Play Being With You/Music is the Key

(HOWING SHADOW SHADOW 49 12") Foul Play's first single since last year's classic "Open Your Mind". "Being With You" is Jungle at its most tightly sprung, polyrhythms coiled tightly into morpheic seashells and then unspurring in sprat helices that bend and involute like crazy. Foul Play "Escherme" tries drum patterns, turn them into impossible corridors down which rhythms tangle in effortless loops that ramsh and

wreck the inner workings of the ear, sending its gyroscope toppling over. "Music Is The Key" doesn't work so well, its over-emoting 'real voice' straining against the seething indifference of the rest of the track. Foul Play should go back to Nicolette's "Now Is Early" to hear how discrepancy might be bred beautifully.

Full Moon Scientist

Monday Morning Dread (HARO) HENOS 15T 12V Sped up to a Jungle ratio but nearly capsized by lugubrious Underworld-style vocals, this followup to the great "Old Man River" works better on the two remixes. The "Grey's Zebra Rarity" mix sounds as if they've been listening to 4 Hero's *Parallel Universe*. Digital dub textures start to ripple and melt at faster speeds, and it makes for an excellent viscous noise, studded with streaks of radio noise and drum shudders. "Lemon Hart Angels Experience" is even better for its brief burst of Future Days guitar. Worth picking up.

Pete Rock & CL

Smooth I Got A Love (ELEKTRA) EP 5700 12V The producers who pushed HipHop towards the soundtrack moment of 1994 return with their first single for two years. The remix of "I Got A Love" is full of Pete Rock's lazy commentary which dawdles after CL Smooth's drawled laconic rap. "The Main Ingredient" has a spongy keyboard vamp which settles into a wandering riff punctuated by stray whoops and yelps. The sound of soft machines.

Sabres Of Paradise

Wilnot (WARDWAD 50 12V) Andrew Weatherall is a grocery clerk doted on by messenger boys, a faux Kurtz grown fat on the lawning caresses of rock grunts so adoring even he must be embarrassed. But on this I can hear the point and the purpose of Sabres. It's all in the trill and the glissando, the swoops of a femme caught up entirely in the oral, entirely unaware of the sliding drums behind her. It's as if a Marko Gras procession has sladdened in oil and kept right on playing, now pulling itself back into tempo, now slurring into early 80s indie dub.



bass scribble. Side two's puntanial kick-thuds present a kind of endurance test that doesn't seem worth it until some stately synths shuffle into the procession and spirit the bass away. They sound nearly as great as DJ Crystl — but not quite, because Weatherall doesn't know who DJ Crystl is yet.

Roni Size & Krust/JMJ & Richie Two On One

Volume Seven (MOVING SHADOW) 201 7 12V The latest in a series of nine releases from Roni Size, who records at Smith & Mighty's Three Stripe Studios in Bristol. On "Witchcraft", layer upon layer of collapsing beats compress and implode as if they're returning to the ocean bed. Aquasynth bubbles frolic until the polyrhythms break the water's edge and open out suddenly onto a clearing that's horizonless, a mist that suffuses your ears with spume and froth, pointillist flecks of synthetic foam. Aphrodite's tears. JMU & Richie's "Deep Base 9" starts with the ragga-Dalek groan that is Jungle's equivalent of the Vocoder and then sways into the sassy staccato fusion that E-Z Rollers also use. Its bass isn't so much seismic as tectonic, so deep it comes at you like a vast plate of solid air, plunging the whole record into the rhythms of silence. Just brilliant.

Skiylab Seashell

Promo 12V The first collaboration by Howe B (Tricky's producer) and Major Force, "Martian Economics" (a Mo Wax B-side) didn't catch fire, but here, with more associates and working under the name Skiylab, they seem less pleased with themselves and far more compelling. They've taken Ambient's sensorium dissolution of the Song, the way it liquefies Techno into air, and patched that through pre-Techno FX — weeping guitars, wheezing synths, samples of ones and whispers, gusts and sighs. A great debut, and the forthcoming album is even better.

Various Artists Pink Me Up

(SABRETTES SER 001 COLPI) This compilation of recent singles from the Sabrettes imprint makes for some painful listening. The Sabrettes aesthetic is peculiarly

negd, refusing to give in or succumb to any soft textures at all. Innersphere's "Lets Go To Work" builds relentlessly into a kind of stroboscopic drill, while Voodoo People's "Attitude" reviews the Roland 303 into a propulsive regime that occasionally breaks for Ambient ram. The "Gutarament" mix of Pyrox Oetox's "Quadra Funk" has a dolorous bell-like guitar tone, but otherwise it's a dull record for fans only.

outline africa

Richard Scott finds life in the bush of ghosts

Dyeneba Odiakote represents the very soul of contemporary Wassoulou music, more so even than the estimable Oumou Sangare or Seki Sidibe. Piratene, her greatest achievement to date, is now available on CD (Melode 09265). Sculptural rhythmic arrangements, the sheer definitive simplicity of the mostly acoustic playing, plus the sheer force of Dyeneba's cutting voice create a cobweb of rhythmic and melodic detail and possibility at once fully-formed and infinite. Regardless of genre or anything else, this is some of the deepest, most extraordinary music I have ever heard. Her only slightly less awe-inspiring first album is also on CD (Melode 381DB). Seki Sidibe's tremendous N'daya International also finds belated European release (*From Timbuktu To Gao*, Shanachie 65011). A massively raw, densely energised rhythmic insistence.

Coumba Sidibe, a member of the old Senegal Instrumental National Ou Mali, is a spiritual mother to all Wassoulou women. Her spinechilling vocal roar on Sangam (Camara CK7 101 MC) is instantly recognisable, its power and timbre reminding me of Howlin' Wolf as it towers over some classic blood-red Wassoulou R&B rhythms. Her *Dounouyan Explosion* (Sha D2901 MC) makes subtle use of music technology and is brighter, more folksy in tone. Two fine albums. Top percussionists Papa Kouyette's CD (Sonodisc CDS B606) is a mixed bag. He sounds vulnerable

Warp: through RTU/Pinnacle

Mo Wax, Sabrettes: through Vital

L'Attitude: through Phonogram

African cassettes: Ntari, 22 Maybridge Square, Goring-By-Sea, Sussex BN12 617

Jungle releases through: Grapevine, Vital

on a Latin-tinged "Yarab" while soft-toned Manam Kouyate sings beautifully on "Malaka" and "Je M'en Fous", which comes as close as I've heard to Malian Techno and is not at all bad, if you ignore the saxophonist.

Smoky-voiced Ouba Korta's magnificent *Khossoune* (Bolbana BIP 91) more or less shuns new technology with a traditional instrumental format and classic, anthemic Mandinka songs. Voice and instruments take equal billing, the musician's intensely busy call and response interplay occasionally threatening to eclipse her voice entirely, adding a combative edge to an ultimately very dignified and moving arrangement. For even more rootsy tones *Amni Be Kelen* (Mie Are One) (Pan 2015 CD) is an intimate field recording from Kela, home of Kasse Mady and much of Mali's oral history of royal music, loud women and tinkling ngonis accompanied by the electric hiss of crickets, cocks crowing and the odd transistor radio. Timeless, and endless.

A few CDs aside, the major medium for West African music remains the import cassette, of which Ntani have hundreds (they're running a new membership and cassette sampler scheme worth checking: info on D903 244948) including a stack of new Malian music and Ivory Coast rap. Traore Seydou (YR003 P93) and Solomani Sialbe's *Kurani* (DMC D9631 D03) help satiate my hunger for Bambara/Wassoulou folklore, though Seydou's preposterous shotgun and Solomani's Anzi 1040 STE might cause concern.

The biggest noise on the cassette stalls is Djeneba Secks' *Konkolegure* (AP1 92003 P92) which combines bang-like ngoni with the usual dodgy drum machine and pointless keyboards. If M's Seck sounds like Nahawa Doumba's younger sister, Amadou Bagayoko and Manam Doumba ("The Blind Couple Of Mali") sound like they could be her parents, subjecting similar Bambara material to more traditional interpretations. The couple's *Volume Four* (Maikano 1D53) is good natured singalong Mali, while *Volume Five* (Maikano 1073)

addresses a heavier and more magnificent bluesy legacy, similar to that explored by Ali Farka Touré. *Music Of The Touareg* (Le Chant Du Monde LDX 2749974) is a terrific ethnographic CD of the music that Farka Touré claims lies at the roots of Bambara music, hence of the blues itself. Phew.

From Guinea, Mory Oyei Oenne Kouyate (BGDA 2091), Kerfale Kanté (SS 2164 MC) and Sona Diely Kouyate (BGDA 91006 CD/SS 2165 MC) contribute superb up-tempo traditional cassettes with a contemporary tinge. Familiar sounding but innovative enough to keep me interested. Pacheco Eto Gumbo (2149B) from Guinea Bissau is a new sound to me. Fast, guitar oriented, very Cuban in some respects, very African in others, quite different from Latin-influenced sounds from Oakar or Kinshasa. I like it a lot, but not as much as Iro Obaro's classy Paris-produced *Aliah Mono* (Sonodisc CDS 6B17) — here is a fantastic voice, reminiscent of Kassy Mady, with remarkable phrasing, and tunes tastefully constructed around unusually hypnotic hi-tech grooves. Could be huge.

Guinean national hero Kanté Mantile heads in the other direction on *Nino Nwola* (Pam 4D2), stripping the music down to voice, strings, balafon — the latest in Gunther Grett's creditable series of Guinean acoustic recordings.

A rare attempt at innovation within the kora tradition comes from Prince Diabate and Amara Samoro whose "Futur Trad" (sic) *Lamaranono* (Buda CD 9257B 2) intimately collects the usual traditional kora repertoire together with subtle borrowings from HipHop and reggae. An unusual playfulness permeates these tunes, which are a world away from the stuffy traditionalism often surrounding the kora.

A dig through the archives uncovers Alhaji Bai Korta's *Koro Melodes From The Gambia* (Rounder CD 5DD1), the first kora album, and one of the most profound. Alhaji Bai's spare, hypnotic style seems quite different from the more cluttered current of contemporary Gambian

performers (most of whom seem to be his sons or nephews). If most kora music does little more than keep a tradition intact, Korta's CD is an incredibly terse, tense meditation on the nature of rhythm itself — he should have played with James Brown. It includes some extremely weird 1973 live recordings not on the original LP.

Badou Jobe is another (actually the other) legendary Gambian musician. As founder of Ifrang Bondi in 1970 he pioneered the use of traditional instruments, and the incorporation of songs and rhythms from 'the bush' in contemporary music, reflecting his country's own cosmopolitan cultural mix. Despite his strenuous avoidance of fame and fortune, he has played as pivotal a role in the development of West African music as Salif Keta or Youssou N'Dour (though Baaba Maal is probably closest to Badou's own legacy). *Darqo* (NW CD 3D09) draws on all his vast experience and has no pretensions — refreshingly it sounds more like a gag than a record — and its liveliness, originality and warmth are uniquely convincing.

Lastly, from Niger, *Nomry Twice* (Sterns STCO 1057) contains two very tight albums by Moussa Poussy and Saadou Boni. The acoustic/electric blend, produced by the ubiquitous Ibrahim Sylla, is similar to recent Malian sounds, but with a tumbling, skipping rhythmic sickness of its own. Extremely tight trance music which would sound massive booming out of a club PA. They must be wicked live.

outline jungle

Kodwo Eshun takes a machete to the latest hardcore releases

Although the ragga end of Jungle has received most coverage to date, most articles have concentrated on General Levy and the role of the MC, to the exclusion of the production aesthetics of the music. With nine or ten compilations on the market at the moment, now is a good time to listen in to sounds that have been severely oversimplified. General

Levy's "Incredible", for instance, should be heard as the latest (and not the best) instalment from his producer M-Beat. From the same source, "Style" on Labelo Blanco's *Jungle Massive* compilation (LB/Collective 4509 97607) is far better, speeding up Foster Sylver's "Msdemeanor" into a quavering off-balance nursery rhyme that unsettles the bravado of the MC's chatting. Also from M-Beat, "Surrender" on Street Tuff's *Jungle Hits Volume One* (STR 1) cheekily swipes the Avengers Theme, while "Sweet Love" locks into the sound system aesthetic, pitching extreme treble against seismic bass.

Swingbeat is a crucial influence on ragga Jungle because its giddy a cappella, oscillating between suppressed horniness, teasing deferral and excessive supplication, have already been processed through Jungle-type effects. Lloydie Crucial's "Ribbon In The Sky" (on *Jungle Hits*) contains Nutswave harmonies that slide between Swing and the delicacy of the original rare groove. Leviticus' track "The Bunaf" reverts Foxy's classic "Madenmore!" into a strikingly off-key sequence of "fooxy" which sound as if they'll fall off the shutting ziggurat rhythms which crashath them.

"The Bunaf" is on no less than four compilations at the moment: the above-mentioned new entries as well as the highly respected *Breakdown Records' Drum & Bass Volume Two* (BD RMT CD3) and *Rumour Records' smart anthology Boss Riders Volume One* (BAZZ 1). Tom And Jerry's great "Maximum Style" turns up on these two as well. Here, the "Lover To Lover" break is played for longer but is masked by slippery (trompe l'oreille) polyrhythms which snake around it like a biomorphic orchid made from digital Ptolemaic strips. The strings create an astonishing sense of the song shedding its ghostly skin for a raucous one and then an itchy-scratchy one.

By contrast, the 'bad bwoy' edge of ragga Jungle is focused and/or manic. *Jungle Hits* has Stry FX & Gunsmeke's "Gangsta Kid" and "Original Nuttah". Both tracks generate a real cool killer vibe, sampling long muffled film sequences with sound FX and

ominous synths "Gangsta Kid" swipes Ray Lotta's archetypal sneer from Goodfellas. "As far back as I can remember I always wanted to be a gangsta", slowing it down before heading off into a ferocious chat. Another approach, deadly rather than swaggering, can be heard on DJ Hype AKA The Ganja Crew's brilliant "Computerse (Cops)", Hardware's "Badman" and Family Of Intelligence's "Champion Of Champions", all on *Boss Raders Volume One*.

"Computerse" starts as a sinister noise — like an alarm bell being stroked by a gun butt — while witty elves merrily sprinkle the refrain. Its chat is measured out between a baffling sample about Jesus falling out of the sky, chilling trinitubulation and a funeral snarl from Cypress Hill's "Insane In The Brain". "Cops, Cops, Cops Come and try and snatch my crops", that limps along as if it's being fatally wounded. "Badman's" stop-motion widgeo reggae is searingly hectic, relentlessly oral aggression while "Champion Of Champions" syncs a dangerously hell-headed voice up against strings and menacingly faint flourishes of fairy dust. At one point the MC insists "Murder him! Kill him!", while everything else drops out apart from the sonic angel dust hovering around the scene. It's an astonishing moment on a superb compilation.

Other more Ambient tracks drop in snatches of reggae and roots as texture in a soundclash. The veteran but underacknowledged Production House's second compilation *Bring In Da Future* (PHNCAZ) has last year's "The Rumble", a stunning blend of meditative reggae and the trembling overspill of lusted longing by DJ Nut Nut And Pure Science.

You can hear a similar sense of gwing in and getting up on Third Party's "Screwface" and Smokey Joe's great "Special Request", and, in a more Garage-inflected paradox of abrupt fluidity, on Rogue Unit's excellent "Nocturnal" and Da Intellex's "What Ya Gonna Do", all on the aforementioned *Jungle Massive*.

While the Jumpy! And Pumpin' label's *Jungle Tekno Three* (TOT 14) and *Four* (TOT 15) stress a

certain seriousness (*Four* is subtitled, ominously, *Intelligence And Technology*) and tend to monotony by the end of each album, *Bring In Da Future* is uptempo and cheerful, illustrated by the almost two step auto-erotic sessor dances of The House Crew's "Superhero".

Boss Raders, Drum & Bass Volume Two and *Ultrasound's This Is Jungle US* (1) have the best mix of dancefloor hits and cult classics, while Kidanem's *Hard Leaders Five* (KICK 12) focuses largely on lesser known tracks and isn't quite as strong as its predecessor. Well up to the standard of the now famous first volume, *Drum & Bass* includes DJ Rom's superb "Pacific State"-based "Mo Music" and deserves a review all to itself. The *Ultrasound* compilation suffers from duplication, although it steals a march on the others by nabbing Higher Sense's "Cold Fresh Air", a track which solves the hell vocal flaw by warping and pitch shifting it into an "Eschersque" corridor of mirrors.

Roni Size & DJ Die's "It's A Jazz Thing" appears on the first three of the compilations mentioned in the previous paragraph. Not quite as brilliant as his previous "Music Box", "Jazz Thing" is nevertheless an archetypal DJ favourite, the epitome of a "musical" track. Its mix of minimal jazz fusion used as percussive melody, its propulsive and nervy play with out and flow, timestretch and synch layering, embodies Jungle balance between the austerity of 4 Hero and the mania of M-Beat.

Hard Leaders Five, conversely, feels as though it's lost its way slightly, never recapturing the swoons and low-flying synth strates of the opening tracks by Skanna and Invisible Man. Equally disappointing are *Jungle Tekno Three* and *Four*. *Volume Three* starts well with Bukem And Peshay's soaring epic "19.5 HZT", and great tracks by DJ Rap and Roger Johnson, but reaches a monotonous plateau with the oversouled duet cries of Wax Doctor's "Fallen Angels", while *Volume Four*, despite cuts such as "Sound Control" by Andy C & Randall, isn't quite as compelling as it could be. □

On-U Sound Continued from page 38

"Like us, we get categorized — people like to see us doing certain styles of music and they're totally anti other things that they don't understand because it's out of their character. A lot of that stuff that we do with Tackhead, that could be considered jazz."

In the studio down the corridor, producer/guitarist Skip McDonald is working with the Scottish singer Jesse Rae — down a phone line. Rae (in Edinburgh) sings a beat loop he wants to use while McDonald clicks on a visual display and transforms the beat. In a similar sense of experiment, Sherwood plans a "virtual studio" which could have the P-Funk keyboard player Bernie Worrell in New York playing with Rae in Edinburgh accompanied by a string section in Bombay. All recorded in real time via phone links delivering DAT quality sound. Sherwood likes technology, but he is no ideologue. He uses what works.

"Tackhead used a lot of drum machines. We were doing it more for the noise element. With reggae, we use 95, no, 98 per cent live drumming, with Style Scott. For the funk stuff, Keith LeBlanc is a great drummer — we try to do as much live stuff as possible. Computers seem easier but you're probably better off with a live drummer, it ends up sounding better — and being quicker in the final analyses."

The situation in Walthamstow looks encouraging, with studios, offices and store rooms looking efficient and well-used. "A year ago I wanted to close the label down because I was very frustrated. I'm a lot happier now. We're a good label — we're not a very good record company, we can't make videos, we can't afford to promote our stuff well enough. I decided I wasn't doing justice to the people I was working with, but then I look at the alternatives and I think, 'Fuck it, we're not doing a bad job.' At least by keeping our head above water, keeping fluidity, we can keep moving people around the world, we can keep doing concerts, we can keep making records — we've got facilities and we've got ideas. We've got to have studios open 24 hours a day, a situation where the sufferer artists who don't sell records, that need a bit of help, they can come in at the weekend or when it's quieter and they can get in for virtually nothing and have the opportunity to use a good studio and own their own tapes — we've got no designs on people's tapes. That situation's now working. We've got ambitious plans. I'm basically trying to build the new Black Ark in Walthamstow."

Sherwood means it: the reference to Lee Scratch Perry's legendary recording studio is not made lightly. What's really encouraging is that — like Jamaican music itself — On-U will keep at it whether or not jungle and reggae bring dub into the charts. Sherwood considers the chart success he had with Gary Clail, for example, as a nuisance for both of them, rather than any kind of "break". Next year he plans a new label to be supervised by himself, Penny Reel and Ray Hurford to release old reggae classics with the On-U endorsement.

I end the conversation by commenting on the number of groups that sound brilliant live but seem to lose all their heat once they enter a studio (Gary Crosby's Jazz Jamaica being one pertinent example). It's a paradox which the On-U Sound groups seem to sail over.

"You've got to bear in mind where musicians' references are, where their heads are at. If everyone's got their say on it, you're going to get a watered down record. It happens to a lot of bands, their records don't sound like their live performance, the energy's lost and they can't for the life of them work out why. But with the studio, you should fuck up the studio, you got to have everybody tuned into how they want the end result to sound — someone's definitely got to impress their personality, their finishing touches on it. Before you make a record you've got to talk about what you want it to sound like, what you're trying to achieve, where you want it to go. I'm getting more and more into doing that. I don't like letting it out of my grip." □

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Strange fruit

Re: David Solomon's letter in *The Wire* 127 begging for info on the German 60s proto-Techno duo Silver Apples. In *ReSearch* #15 *Incredibly Strange Music Volume Two*, the ex-Dead Kennedy Jello Biafra is quoted thus: "Another 60s group that's a link between the Limelight label and Walter Carlos-type electronics is The Silver Apples, who made two albums, *Contact* and *Silver Apples*, on Kapp. They had a drummer and a guy who called himself 'The Sman', who bought all these oscillators in a navy surplus store and built his own instrument. It's pulsating, driving trance electronics — I'd call them the mid-60s version of Suicide, powerful and hypnotic. They merit some serious study, for starters, what happened to 'The Sman'?"

For those wondering what relevance 'the Limelight label' might have to all of this, Biafra earlier refers to it as "a label devoted to 'exotica' spilling into avant garde electronics." Sounds like *The Future Sound Of London* to me.

James Webb, Nottingham

CD conspiracy

While I am aware that you are not a hi-fi magazine, I believe that the

way we purchase and listen to music is important to those of us with more than a passing interest in it.

My concern is with the seemingly uncritical acceptance of the CD as an appropriate medium for recorded music. When it was launched ten or so years ago, CD was hailed as 'perfect sound forever'. Although obviously hype, there has been surprisingly little resistance to this assertion.

This is clearly the deaf leading the deaf. Leaving aside the longevity (or otherwise) of this medium, compared to vinyl it sounds ratty. Sure, there are certain advantages — smaller size, cheaper manufacturing costs, less background noise, a little more bass. However, the resulting sound lacks subtlety, compared to vinyl it sounds closed in, the natural timbre of instruments and voices is lost, timing is smeared. What this amounts to is less emotional impact.

There is, it seems, a logical explanation for all this (if you need more than the evidence of your ears): it has been estimated that there is about 100 times more information on a record than on a CD. This is because the resolution of an analogue record is effectively fractal and only limited by the size of the vinyl molecule, in other

words, more detail can be discerned with better playback equipment. This doesn't mean that expensive turntables are necessarily required. A \$300 turntable will sound better than a \$600 CD player.

The practice of Hip-hop producers and others of putting vinyl surface noise on CD releases is to be encouraged, as it may result in listeners twigging that the absence of occasional clicks and pops is a questionable trade off for sound quality. Even the developers of the CD format (Philips and Sony) are now acknowledging that all is not well with the silver discs and are attempting to improve matters by fiddling at the data encoding stage. This can only be a stop gap measure, what is inevitable is a new format, one which is a real improvement on vinyl. Until that day, don't believe the hype and don't throw away your records.

Michael Wall, Orpington

Fan letter

The lead letter (*The Wire* 121) was really stupid. It's hard to believe that Gareth K Vise has the energy to spend a whole letter debunking Frank Zappa's genius with a slew of such unflattering, ludicrous statements

It's amusing just how vehement Zappa detractors feel they have to be to defend their ignorance. Vise is welcome to his opinions, but who really cares whether or not Zappa is "a negligible figure in music"? Certainly not hardcore Zappa fans, for whom the proof is in the pudding (so to speak).

Considerable portions of my recreation time are spent enjoying the work of composers and musicians who have enjoyed scant recognition. This doesn't and shouldn't limit my appreciation of their music.

With every one of Vise's remarks I was more staggered with disbelief. His descriptions of Zappa's music bear practically no relation to the body of work that has consistently given me so much pleasure.

Ben Watson's preposterous book (*The Negative Dialectics Of Poodle Play*) at least redresses the balance by explaining eloquently (and in great detail) what Zappa fans really hear when they listen to the great man's music. And ultimately, what those fans hear (the endless innovation, the peerless performances, the auditory stimulation, the laughs, the) is the only important consequence of Zappa's work.

Gary Steel, Auckland, New Zealand

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